

NEBULA

BI-MONTHLY

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SCIENCE FICTION

NUMBER 13



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NEBULA

SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by PETER HAMILTON

Issue Number Thirteen

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Look here . . .

As you will very probably have noticed, Nebula has not been appearing on your news stand as regularly as the "Bi-monthly" on the cover would have you believe. In fact, production problems which were the cause of this irregularity have monopolized my attention to such an extent that there was an imminent danger of the neglect of other important matters like the quality of the stories in each issue. However, these problems are now at an end, and as you may have noticed from this issue, a new firm has been given the job of printing the magazine, thus ensuring a regular bi-monthly appearance from this current number onwards. Some of you may also have noticed that this issue of the magazine is not quite so bulky as usual. This is due to a new type of paper which we are using and which promises to give a much improved reproduction for interior illustrations and a much cleaner job in the printing generally. Of course, the smaller size is not entirely due to this, the costs of production have forced me very regretfully to cut sixteen pages out of this current issue of the magazine. However, if the wonderful support which readers have displayed towards Nebula in the past continues, we will very soon be able to revert to the old 128-page size again.

Although the magazine may be slightly thinner this time, I think you will agree that I have made up for it by the wonderful selection of material I have printed in this issue. Now that I am freed from all the worries of obtaining new production facilities, I am right back fighting hard to give you, the regular reader of Nebula, something outstanding and different in the field of Science Fiction regularly every two months. By cutting pages from the magazine, much as I dislike doing so, I am able to obtain an even finer selection than before of top-line story material, the kind of stories which made Nebula double its circulation with each issue in its early days, and as soon as enough of this type of story is coming in, I shall not hesitate to put the magazine on the regular monthly schedule which so many readers have requested. So, you see what we are temporarily losing in quantity, we will immediately regain in quality. I am sure that is what most readers prefer.

Nebula is a British Magazine and proud of it, and so I will certainly not follow the lead of other British Science Fiction Magazines in their current orgy of American reprinting. British Authors have led the whole world in other types of literature and can certainly do so in Science Fiction, but they would never get the chance if it was left to the people in charge of many contemporary science-fiction magazines, who seem to think that a story cannot be popular unless it is written in America, and that no matter how hard they try, their magazines will never be as good as those published across the Atlantic.

Planetbound

They had to get the first rocket off earth before the enemy—there were unforeseeable difficulties, however

Illustrated by Harry Turner

He had to escape.

He had to get up and get out and run and keep on running. He had to get away from noise and metal, harsh clothing and the cold, damp, sickening sweat of fear. He had to get back to the things he knew, the old familiar things, grass and the clear blue of the sky, snow and the sullen clouds of winter. He wanted to delve his fingers deep into dirt and tend the fragile stems of growing things. He wanted to hide his face in his mother's apron and feel the comforting touch of her hand. He wanted to be safe and snug and secure again as he used to be when a boy.

Around him the metal walls glowed with countless eyes, each eye seeming to mock him with its cold indifference. Before him the levers raised themselves like the skeleton hands of ambitions long dead, grim reminders of the stupidity of Man. Around him the thick clothing swaddled him in an imprisoning cocoon so tight that he could twitch his toes, move his hands, roll his eyes and turn his head a little, and that was all.

And yet he had to escape.

He had to break free from this coffin of metal and plastic. He had to get up and get out—and he had to do it now.

He whimpered as he tore at the webbing, cursing as his gloved hands fumbled for buckles beyond his reach. He sobbed as he strained against what held him, writhing in blind unthinking fury against his personal prison. He ignored the winking lights. He ignored the drone of senseless sound echoing in his ears. He ignored everything except the one thing he couldn't ignore.

He had to get out.

But he couldn't.

He had to escape.

But he couldn't

He had to get away from all this.

But he couldn't . . . he couldn't . . . he couldn't . . .

The bunker was a haze of cigarette smoke, the concrete floor littered with crushed and trampled butts, crumpled cardboard containers which had once held coffee, the white patches of gum and the twisted sticks of matches. As usual it was a mess and, as usual, no one paid any attention to the litter. Everyone, from the tense pilots at the monitoring boards to the interested, but inactive men staring at the screens, had their attention focussed wholly on a point of metal two hundred feet long and fifteen hundred miles high.

"He's broken." Brenson, his uniform rumpled and soiled with cigarette ash and long hours of wear, fumbled in his pockets for cigarettes, fished vacantly in the empty package, then flung it petulantly to the littered floor.

"Have one of mine, Colonel." Henderly, tall, thin, stooped, with an expression which matched that of the officer for perpetual worry, held out his case. "He hasn't broken yet."

"Then why doesn't he answer?" Brenson jerked his head to where a technician sat before a microphone, his droning voice unanswered from the speakers above his head. "Two minutes now and still no contact. Why the hell doesn't he answer?"

The psychologist shrugged. If he knew the answer to that, he thought drearily, he'd know the answer to a lot of things. He frowned at an auxiliary panel at his side.

"Temperature is rising, but that's normal." He pointed towards the row of dials. "Perspiration increasing and respiration erratic. His heart-beat has mounted and there are signs of involuntary nervous twitch-



ing." He looked at the Colonel. "Unfortunately this junk tells us nothing. We know that these are physical symptoms appertaining to fear and anger, but what of it? In his condition an increase of adrenaline is to be expected. The temperature rise and erratic respiration could be simply due to excitement, and it is natural for him to be experiencing some fear."

"I'm not interested in his physical condition," snapped Brenson. "Is he cracking up?"

"I don't know." Henderly glanced towards one of the technicians operating the monitor panels. "Is he on manual?"

"No."

"Has he been?"

"He took over at one hundred. He managed up to the thousand mark and then began to get erratic." The man gestured towards his panel. "I've recorded his variations. Naturally we supervised him all the way up and he was in no danger."

"How bad were the variations?"

"If we hadn't been monitoring him he would have gone into crash orbit at twelve hundred."

"And now?"

"Now he's not even trying."

"He's broken," repeated Brenson savagely. "I tell you that he's broken."

Henderly nodded. Whatever physical condition the man was in it was obvious that, as a pilot, he was of no use at all. If it hadn't been for the remote control monitoring the ship it would have crashed into molten ruin long ago. Foresight had guarded against that, foresight and grim experience. He stiffened as the radio operator called over to him.

"Getting a response now. Shall I step up and cut in?"

"Is it that faint?" Brenson stepped forward, Henderly at his side.

"Sub-vocal. Listen." The operator threw a switch and turned a rheostat. "At max gain we can just get it."

In the abrupt silence of the bunker the thin noises seemed startlingly loud and, as he heard them, Henderly turned white.

"Bring him down," he said sickly. "Bring him down—fast!"

The pilots hesitated, looking towards the colonel for confirmation.

"Bring him down," said Brenson loudly. "And turn that thing off."

Silence replaced the thin, whimpering tones from the speakers.

Henderly tried to rub the grit of sleeplessness from his eyes and wished that the meeting could have been delayed. It couldn't. Time was too precious for that and, as he sat down, he recognised the strained expressions on the faces of the men around him.

Brenson, tired and looking older than his half-century. Winnek, irritable as ever now that he was fronted with a problem a slide rule and a set of equations couldn't solve. Jaques, the accountant with a cash register for a heart and his fingers on the pulse of finance. Thoren, the liaison officer between the project and the government. Thoren especially seemed to be on the verge of emotional explosion, but in that he differed from the others only in a matter of degree. He cleared his throat as Henderly sat down.

"Well, gentlemen. You all know why I have called this conference so let's make it brief." He stared down at a thin sheaf of papers before him. Companion sets rested before each man, the mineoed results of the past five tests, but none of the others followed Thoren's example. They knew them by heart.

"You're going to ask us 'how long'," said Brenson heavily. "The answer is that I don't know."

"Hardly an illuminating reply, Colonel." Thoren wasn't sarcastic, he was merely stating a fact. "As you know the government have left you pretty much to your own devices. You have been supplied with

men, money, equipment and supplies. You know the objective. What the government now wish to know is some idea as to when you are going to reach it."

"Wait." Henderly rapped on the table for attention. "Let's not start this thing on the wrong footing. The way you are talking, Thoren, makes it sound as though the project and the government are two different things. They're not. Let's have no delusions or false antagonism over a rivalry which does not exist."

"Semantics, Henderly?" This time Thoren was being sarcastic.

"Good sense, General. We are a team, let's remember that. Our enemy is not the government."

"We know who our enemy is," said Thoren tightly. "It is up to you, to us, to beat them in the race for the Moon base. It is a race which we dare not lose."

"We haven't lost it," growled Winnek. "The ships are as perfect as we can make them. We could build a space station at an altitude of five hundred miles and our ships can reach the Moon."

"A space station at that altitude would be a sitting target." Thoren dismissed the idea as it had been dismissed before. "I will accept your word that the ships are capable." He glanced down at the papers again. "The problem, seemingly, is the human element." He looked at Henderly. "As the official psychologist attached to the project perhaps you would like to explain just what is wrong?"

"I have made my reports."

"Agreed. But I have to pass on this information to my superiors and I have to use layman's language." Thoren relaxed. "Just what seems to be the trouble, Henderly?"

"Human nature." The psychologist shrugged at Thoren's expression. "I'll put it a different way. We have ships capable of reaching the Moon, but we haven't men capable of piloting them. Don't ask me why, I don't know. All I can do is to make some intelligent guesses based on the few facts we have. We know that of the last five manned vessels we have sent up, all five have proved failures." He smiled at Winnek's involuntary protest. "Not mechanical failures, human. The men just aren't fit to operate the machines. As far as we can tell they remain sane and normal up to about a thousand miles. Nine hundred and ninety-five as near as we can determine. Beyond that something happens. To put it quite briefly the pilots become insane."

"Temporary?"

"No." Henderly felt sick as he thought about it. "The condition is not a new one to medical science. Dementia praecox, one of the nastiest mental illnesses known, but the speed at which it happens is the

most appalling thing. The men leave here fit, trained, and as well-equipped as we can make them. They manage to handle the controls up to just beyond the thousand mark. Then they become erratic, cease communication, lose control and, when we finally bring them down again, they are fit for nothing but the mental wards."

"Can't you question them? Find out what caused their illness?"

"If we could then they wouldn't be insane—not as they are anyway." Henderly sighed with impatience, forcing himself to remember that, in an age of specialisation, irritation at apparent stupidity was an illogical emotion. "We cannot communicate with them," he explained patiently. "To put it roughly dementia praecox is an illness where the patient literally runs away from himself. Not physically, that would be impossible, but mentally. He seeks escape by withdrawing into his own past but, because no matter where he tries to halt he still finds worry and frustration, he has to keep on running. Those pilots have no more intelligence than a foetus which, mentally, is just what they are. They are incapable of speech, logical thought, of feeding themselves or of the most basic necessities of living. They are more helpless than the newest of the new-born."

"Incredible!" Thoren blinked. "I don't doubt your word, doctor, but . . ." He swallowed. "All five the same?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"And no possibility of cure?"

"None."

"I see." Thoren frowned down at the little sheaf of papers. "I take it that you have sent up test animals?"

"Naturally. Mice, rabbits, guinea pigs monkeys, two apes and two small bears. We've even sent up frogs, birds, insects and reptiles. We've sent up rats, dogs, cats and hamsters. They tell us nothing."

"Nothing?" Polite doubt registered itself in the single word. "Surely they proved that space itself was harmless to living organisms?"

"They proved that animals could venture past the atmosphere and return apparently unharmed. They proved that, as far as we know, unshielded radiations do no physical damage. Apparently." Henderly stressed the word. "Unfortunately animals are not men."

"But there are similarities surely? If an animal, say a dog, can survive, then why not a man?"

"Because men do not walk on all fours, do not have pointed ears, a tail, fur, or sweat via their tongues. Because men are *men*, not animals." Henderly shrugged. "Ask me to define the difference between men and animals and I'll have to refer you to God. They are not the same. The blood is different, the metabolism, a thousand little things which utterly

divorce human from animal. The most obvious difference is that men can reason while animals apparently do not."

"I'll question you on that, Henderly." Jaques spoke for the first time. "I have a dog who is almost the equal of a man for intelligence. He can obey verbal instructions, open a door and do small errands. That dog . . ."

"Please!" The psychologist made no attempt to hide his disgust. "When that precious animal of yours can write a book, hold a conversation even though it be in a series of barks, or sit down and start to worry about tomorrow's dinner then I'll listen to you. Until then do not insult my intelligence with the conditioned reflexes of a parasitical animal. Dogs are *not* intelligent, not as I use the term."

"Isn't that just your private opinion?" Jacques glared at the thin man with mounting anger. "I'll back Rex against a moron any day."

"If you define intelligence as the ability to persuade a soft-hearted fool to feed you, then I'll admit your claim."

"Your dog is more intelligent than anyone in this room, we all have to work for our food. But if you are claiming that your animal is capable of reasoning, of acquiring data and extrapolating from it, or, more important, if the animal shows signs of mental distress caused by worry and surmise, then all I can say is that you'd better revise your opinions." Henderly glanced at the others, sitting wooden-faced around him. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I have little patience with ignorance."

He didn't look at the flushed face of the accountant.

Winnek broke the uneasy silence. The engineer cleared his throat and toyed with the slide-rule he inevitably carried in his pocket.

"Isn't the problem merely one of engineering? To me the remedy of any defective part is simple. Try something else until you find what you need. That's the way we perfected the ships."

"Not quite," said Henderly. He wished that the engineer would stop playing with his rule. An obvious example of fetish-control only one step removed culturally and none at all emotionally, from the savage who nursed his amulet. He guessed that Winnek would be utterly lost without it.

"You were able to test your material on the ground beneath control conditions," he explained. "Also, you were able to develop new alloys and techniques to meet diverse conditions. Unfortunately for us we have a very limited selection of human material on which to work. Size, sex, skin colouring, intelligence quota, religious beliefs and personal indoctrination. Aside from that there is no variation."

"Let's examine Winnek's proposition," said Brenson. The colonel was tired and his voice showed it. "Obviously there are certain specifications for men as well as for machines. What do we need?" He began checking points off on his fingers. "Sex, male. Size, preferably small but that isn't too important. Colouring, again not important. Intelligence quota must be high in order for assimilation of the training. Religious beliefs and personal indoctrination?" He shrugged. "Frankly I can't see how they enter into it."

"A Hindu whose religion taught him that the world is carried on the back of a giant turtle would not be acceptable as a pilot," said Henderly. "Once he rose high enough to see that there was no turtle he would enter immediate conflict between his faith and his senses. If he believed his religion then he must discount what his eyes told him. If he accepted the evidence of his senses, then his faith would have to be discarded. Either way would prove a strain and, if he could not compromise, then he would go insane. A believer in the flat Earth theory, personal indoctrination, would suffer the same."

"An intelligent man would hardly believe either of those ridiculous theories," snapped Jaques. "The situation would never arise."

"Intelligence, unfortunately, has nothing whatever to do with religion," said Henderly tiredly. "It also has nothing to do with faith. Intelligence is reason, religion and faith are emotional. If they weren't then the growth of intelligence would see the inevitable decline of religion in the sense of blind worship of the unknown and the acceptance of unproved data."

"We digress," snapped Brenson. "Discussions of this nature are nice in their way, but we have no time for theology or philosophy." He looked at the psychologist. "Your recommendations?"

"Further tests. There is something up there, which we must know about before we can beat. I want to send up men and checking instruments."

"You have those," said Winnek. His nicotine-stained fingers caressed his rule. "The auxiliary panel relays information of a medical nature."

"That isn't what I want. We know that the pilots sweat and that their heart beat accelerates. We know enough now to anticipate and guard against the effects of high-G black out. What I need to know is what happens to the mind above the thousand mile mark. I want to put an encephalocardiograph in the rocket ship so that it can relay the brain-waves of the pilot." He looked at Brenson. "Can it be done?"

"How heavy are these things?"

"Latest models weigh about three hundredweight. That includes stand and recording devices, of course."

Brenson nodded and glanced towards the engineer. "Well?"

"It'll be tight." Winnek operated his toy and frowned at the answer. "Damn tight. We've got the ship loaded with remote control apparatus as it is. That, together with test instruments, monitoring equipment and relay screen add up to almost max pay-load." He operated his rule again. "Maybe. I've never yet seen commercial equipment I couldn't strip down and rebuild at half the weight." He nodded. "Can do."

"Good." Brenson stared at Henderly. "You think that will solve the problem?"

"Of course not. The tests are to try and find out what we're up against. Once we know that we can begin to discover a way to beat it."

"How expensive are these things?" Jaques leaned a little forward as he asked the question. Thoren spoke before Henderly could answer.

"It doesn't matter. This project has top-priority and I can authorise the expense." He glanced at Henderly. "Is there anything else you need?"

"Volunteers. The usual pattern but send me a selection to choose from."

"I'll see to it." The liaison officer stared around the table. "Well, gentlemen, I'll try to keep an investigating committee off your necks but I can't promise too much. After your success in perfecting the ships the government find it hard to see any reason for further delay." He smiled. "I hope that I can assure them that soon our ships will be carrying men to the Moon."

"Do that," said Brenson. He rose as Thoren stepped away from his chair. "This is just another problem and we'll beat it as we have the others."

Henderly wished that he could share the other's optimism.

The volunteers were, as usual, the cream of the service. Trained pilots all, highly intelligent, with fast reflexes and trained skill they tended to regard the opportunity as either just another job or as the ultimate peak of their career. Henderly interviewed them, first as a group, then as individuals and, at the end of his preliminary examination, had cut their number by half.

Even he did not really know just why he had chosen the final half-dozen.

He could find reasons for eliminating the failures. One had a pathetic belief in "authority" and had long ago sublimated his own inclinations to the mores of society. Another tried to be casual but Henderly suspected a hidden death-wish and dared not take the chance of accepting him. A third was plainly paranoid. The others were all overweight. Of the remaining six Henderly selected three.

Jarvis was young, enthusiastic, keen and eager to make the flight and impatient to get his training over and done with. He was a fatalist, a firm believer that he would die when his number was up and not until then. His conviction gave him a careless, almost defiant air, and he seemed to be well-integrated emotionally.

Kendle was also a fatalist but he called it the "will of God." Deeply devout he had managed to reconcile faith with materialism, and, to him, his God was very real.

Raymond was a typical product of his age. Brash, arrogant, self-sufficient, proud of what he was and the things that had made him. Without faith other than in his own strength. To him the flight was just another job, an opportunity of pitting his skill and brain against an unknown enemy. A chance to find out just how strong he was for, to him, a man was just as strong as he wished to be. He had no time for the props of either orthodox religion or personal indoctrination.

Henderly took his small reports in to Brenson and hoped that, this time, he had selected the right material.

"You think that one of these will make it?" Brenson stared down at the sheets before him and, from the way he spoke, Henderly could tell that he was worried. Everyone on the project was worried but Brenson felt that continued failure would be a direct confession of his own inability.

"I don't know." Henderly rested his forefinger against the sheets. "I've picked three, diametrically opposed types. The individual, the fatalist, the believer in God."

"Why?"

"The individual, Raymond, will be the control. As far as I can determine he is our mythical 'average man.' No faith, no strong personal indoctrination, nothing to rely on other than himself. Jarvis, the fatalist, has his creed to bolster him. If that creed is strong enough he will be able to avoid personal responsibility and blame his failure, if he fails, on Fate. Kendle, of course, has his God." Henderly stared thoughtfully down at the typed sheet. "You know, I envy Kendle in a way. It is a wonderful thing for a man to be able to sublimate himself to the extent required by orthodox religion. It must be incredible comfort to be able to do so."

"Won't it clash with what he's doing?"

"Did it clash with soldiers when they went to war?" Henderly shrugged. "It won't clash. Kendle will never torment himself with trying to find the answer to the unanswerable. He has the reply for anything and everything which may happen to torment him. "It is the will of God."

"He's a fatalist, then."

"Not quite. Jarvis does not believe in deity. In that he is weaker than Kendle who does. Jarvis is strictly a materialist but believes that the future, in major issues, is as concrete as the past. He will die when it is time for him to die and not before." He tapped the report sheet "That probably accounts for his apparent delight in taking risks. He has assured himself of inviolability and, to himself, is perfectly safe until it is time for his death."

"I see." Brenson riffled the papers then stared at the psychologist. "Who, among these three, do you think has the best chance?"

"Kendle. It is a fact that the incidence of insanity among the devout is less than that of unbelievers."

Brenson shrugged and turned away.

The bunker was hot with mid-day heat and the sweat of men. Against the shuffle and movement the voice from the speakers rang with amplified strength.

"Eight seventy-five and going like a gun."

Raymond, strapped into the control cabin like a modern mummy, swathed and bundled in a high-G suit, with electrodes pressing against his skull, instruments taped against his flesh, armed and armoured against everything Henderly could think of. Raymond, first of the new tests.

For it was men they were testing now, not machines. The ships could rise beyond the atmosphere, reach escape velocity and rise beyond the strength of gravity, but guided missiles would not be able to build the essential base on the Moon. It took men to do that, but they had to be the right sort of men.

"How's he going?" Brenson stooped over Henderly's shoulder and stared at the wavering lines on the screen before him. "Signals getting through, O.K.?"

"Fair enough. See?" The psychologist pointed to where a flickering line suddenly evened out before it started flickering again. "The alpha line. He closed his eyes."

"You can tell that?" Brenson nodded. "Good. Let's hope that today will give us the data we need." He hesitated, I'm sending up the

other two one after the other."

"What!" Henderly turned from the screen, his eyes revealing his shock. "You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"We may find something on the first test which will make the others unnecessary. Or we may not, in which case they will all break. I . . ."

"You want data, don't you?" Brenson didn't look at the psychologist. "Well?"

"It's the only way to get it, I know," admitted Henderly. "But . . ."

"Time," said Brenson harshly. "We've not got the time to play it slow and safe. Thoren was on my neck again this morning. The government is getting worried at reports they've had from you-know-who. We've got to speed this thing up."

"But the men!"

"The men are expendable." He turned as a technician called to him from the monitoring panel. "One thousand, sir."

"Raymond!" Henderly gripped the microphone and snapped the command. "Listen. I want you to keep talking. I want you to tell me just what you feel. Never mind the instruments, just concentrate on how you feel."

"I feel fine, Doc." The amused contempt of the distant man came clearly over the speakers. "No little green men, no visions, no revelations, nothing." The voice grew thoughtful. "Eleven hundred miles high. That's a long way up, Doc. A hell of a long way."

"Any headaches?" Henderly stared at the wavering pattern of lines on the screen before him. "Any depression?"

"No." The voice grew even more thoughtful. "I wonder what would happen if I should fall? It's a long way down and I haven't got a 'chute. If anything went wrong with this crate you'd never find enough of me to bury."

"Stop thinking that! Nothing is going to happen to you, nothing!" Henderly wiped sweat from his forehead as he stared towards Brenson. "Is he still on manual?"

"He thinks he is." The colonel shook his head as one of the technicians made the thumbs down sign. "Over-compensating all the time. If he was really piloting that ship he'd be in crash orbit now."

"One little slip," said Raymond. "Just one little slip and I'd be coming down like a shooting star." Abruptly his voice changed. "I want to get out of here!"

"Raymond!" Henderly gripped the microphone until his knuckles showed white beneath the skin. "Take it easy! You're not piloting that ship. Understand? You are not in control of the ship! You . . ."

It was the worst thing he could have said. He realised it after but then it was too late. Raymond had only caught the first part of what was said, not the later reassurances. His mind snapped at twelve hundred and thirty-five miles.

Jarvis, despite his fatalism, broke at twelve hundred and seven.

Kendle lasted until twelve hundred and sixty four.

None of the men were sane on landing.

The office was dark but for the brilliant cone thrown by a reading lamp and the peculiar, green-yellow illumination from a cathode-ray screen. Henderly stared at the wavering pattern of lines, grunted, compared a printed photograph with another, then leaned back in baffled helplessness.

He looked up as the door opened and Brenson entered the room.

"Hello, Colonel. Got any cigarettes? I'm right out."

"Here." Brenson threw a package on the paper-littered table, "Keep them, I've got plenty." He waited until the psychologist had lit up and expelled the first deep lungful of smoke. "Any luck?"

"No."

"Any results then? Damn it, Henderly, you must have some kind of an answer!"

"Certainly. Ground the ships or keep them below the thousand mile mark until we know how to beat this thing."

"That's impossible!"

"Is it?" Henderly shrugged, then yawned and shook his head.

"Hell, but I'm tired. Any chance of coffee, Colonel?"

"The cafeteria's closed. It's almost dawn."

"Dawn?"

"That's right. You've been working non-stop for almost forty-eight hours now." Brenson helped himself to a cigarette from the package on the desk. "I've just come from the hospital. Is there no hope for them at all?"

"No."

"Are you certain of that? Damn it, it doesn't seem reasonable. One minute they seem O.K., the next . . ." Brenson made an expressive gesture. "Seems to be as if something as acute as all that should be easier to cure than a chronic illness."

"Does it matter how fast it comes once it's there?" Henderly picked up some of his photographs and rifled them through his fingers. "Their encephalograms compare exactly to other cases of dementia praecox. The change was swift, I haven't enough data to work out each

step, but it seemed to happen all at once. With Raymond it happened when he began to think how high up he was; with Jarvis when he spoke of knowing he had poor control; with Kendle after he had begun to rave." He shrugged. "Apparently I was wrong about Kendle. His faith wasn't strong enough, or maybe it was too strong. It doesn't matter now."

"Eight so far," whispered Brenson sickly. "Trained men, intelligent, the best we could get." Irritably he crushed out the cigarette and immediately reached for another. "It wouldn't be so bad if we could cure them."

"We can't." Henderly was sombre. "In a way those men have found their own cure. They have solved their own problem." He looked at Brenson. "All of us, to a greater or a lesser extent, are insane. All of us are neurotic, some are psychotic, and a surprisingly large number are schizophrenic. Civilisation has brought more with it than radios, electric washing machines, jet planes, atom bombs, processed food, income tax and ulcers. It has brought insanity."

"Define your terms," said Brenson slowly. "That's rather a generalisation, isn't it?"

"A justified one." Henderly picked a shred of tobacco from his lower lip. "Tobacco! What else is it than a drug? Tea, the same. Coffee, alcohol, the films, the comic-books, the television, the commercial entertainments, the risk-sports, all to provide a means of escape from reality. Euphoria from the day-to-day monotony of living. To worry now is to be normal. To be afraid of what may never happen, to try to guard against assumptions, to be ever on the alert against being robbed, twisted, finangled, hoodwinked, to be smarter and sharper than the next guy. Civilisation!"

"We can live with it," said Brenson. "We have to."

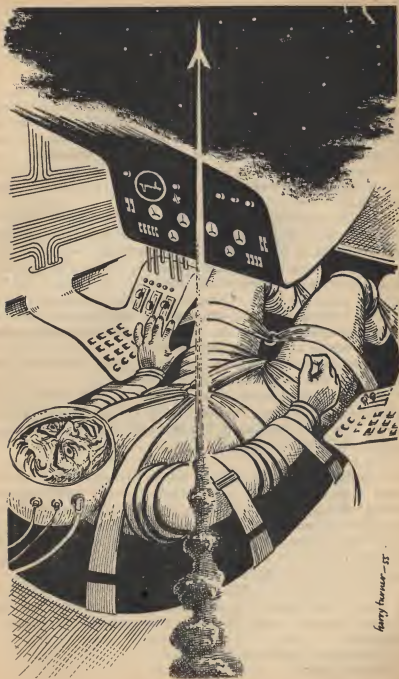
"We can't live with it," corrected Henderly. "All we can do is to tolerate it." He crushed out his cigarette. "Look at it this way. It seems logical to assume that, if people are taught to read and write, then they will become more intelligent. Right?"

"I agree."

"It didn't work out that way. People can read now, sure, but are they more intelligent? Listen in to some of the commercial ads if you can't make up your mind. Read some of the newspapers, the popular books—if you can find any without pictures—and then take a second look at the advertising. Then ask yourself if intelligent people would be willing to swallow that bilge." Henderly snorted. "Even that dog of Jaques' wouldn't accept that guff."

"So what are you trying to prove?"

"I'm trying to say that maybe we've got the wrong measure of what



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constitutes intelligence." Henderly shrugged. "Don't tie me down, Brenson. I've got a jig-saw here and I'm not too sure that any of the pieces even belong to the same pattern." He rubbed his forehead with his long stained fingers. "We need an intelligent man to pilot a rocket ship, right?"

"Right."

"That means he must know quite a bit about a lot of things. Dead languages, perhaps, involved math, a complex pattern of social mores, the latest dance steps, how to drive a car, pilot a plane, dial a number on a visiphone . . ." Henderly stared at the colonel. "You tell me."

"You're getting confused. Intelligence isn't what you know, it's how to apply what you know." Brenson smiled. "You should know what I mean."

"I've been looking over the entrance requirements for service personnel." Henderly flipped a heap of papers. "A pilot, for example, has a fairly high standard of education—but most of it is quite useless. He receives intensive training, most of which he could do without. On top of that he has the normal worries of keeping a home, providing for his future, taking care not to step on the wrong toes. In other words he has to live a normal life. And yet we call him intelligent. A tramp, on the other hand, has none of these worries. He has solved his problem by simply refusing to work. Is he intelligent?"

"I don't know." Brenson was becoming annoyed. "What the hell has this to do with our problem?"

"Conflict," said Henderly. "When a man is in conflict with himself, then that man is not sane. Dementia praecox is due to an unresolvable conflict. The patient finds escape by running away and so avoids having to reach a decision."

"So?"

"That's what I'd like to know." Henderly glanced at the flickering surface of the screen. "We have a pattern of sorts. Eight intelligent men, all suffering from the same illness, all victims of what is apparently an unresolvable problem. What problem? What causes them to run away? What is up there beyond the thousand mile mark to cause such a swift breakdown?" He smiled lopsidedly at the colonel. "That's what I've been trying to deduce during the past thirty-six hours."

Winnek came into the room carrying cardboard containers of steaming coffee. The engineer looked as though he had slept in his clothes which was probably a fact. He grunted with annoyance as he fumbled in his pockets.

"Seen my rule anywhere, Henderly?"

"Your slide rule?"

"Yes, I can't find it anywhere. Damn it! I feel lost without it."

"It'll turn up." The psychologist sipped at his coffee and jerked his head towards the colonel. "We've been trying to resolve the problems of the world. Can you help?"

"The pilots?" Winnek shrugged. "I'm no psychologist but, as an engineer, maybe I could make a suggestion."

"Go ahead."

"Heavy shielding to protect them from whatever it is sending them batty."

"You think it's due to the radiation?" Brenson shook his head. "There is radiation up there, admitted, but as far as we know it isn't harmful. Down on Earth, of course, it's filtered out by the Kennedy-Heavyside layer." He stared at Henderly. "Could it be that?"

"Perhaps. We know that the human brain is governed by a system of electric impulses, the encephalocardiograph proves that, we can amplify those impulses and record them. Maybe radiation does affect the brain in some way."

"It didn't affect the animals," reminded Brenson. "They seemed all right."

"A man isn't an animal," insisted Henderly wearily. He frowned thoughtfully at the dancing lines on the cathode screen. "Is there nothing we can do to the design of the ships?"

"We tried it," said Winnek. He swore as his groping fingers missed his toy. "We used direct vision ports and ran into trouble with different co-efficients of expansion and contraction. We used transparent plastic and you made us stop it. Agoraphobia you said. So we switched to solid sheeting."

"Claustrophobia?" Brenson paused in the act of lighting a cigarette. Henderly shook his head.

"We test for that." He bit his lip. "What do you think, Winnek?"

"I think that anyone who is crazy enough to sit on top of a hundred thousand tons of high explosive is around the bend to start with." The engineer grinned. "Oh, I know that it's safe enough—perhaps. But I'm one of those people with a hell of a morbid imagination. That's why I hardly ever fly, I'm too scared of crashing." He swore again as he searched his pockets. "I've got to find that rule! See you!"

Brenson stared after the engineer as he left the room.

"Think there's anything in what he said?"

"I don't know." Henderly rubbed his forehead. "The trouble is that we are dealing with the unknown. Human beings, their study and care, has always lagged far behind technology. How do we know how

a man really feels when he's in one of those cabins. Never mind what he tells us, that's just his conscious talking, what about his sub-conscious? Does it like being thrust into so much danger? If so, then where is the dividing line? Jet-plane—O.K. Rocket plane—O.K. Rocket ship—not acceptable."

"Theories," said Brenson. "In the old days they believed that a man would die if he moved faster than twenty miles an hour. We know different now."

"We know that acceleration can be dangerous but that speed isn't," corrected Henderly. "But that again is just a question of degree. If one of those old-timers had been loaded into a rocket plane and told he was travelling at two thousand miles an hour he might have died from shock: mental shock. He would *know* that a man just can't live at such speeds and, *knowing* that for a fact, he would have to die to prove it."

"This is interesting, but hardly germane." Brenson crushed his coffee container in one hand. "I have sent for another twenty volunteers. This time I suggest we extend the field, use more diverse types, and maybe we can find out something."

"You can't send those men up there." Henderly was surprised to find that his voice was beneath perfect control. "We have eight men in the hospitable now. Eight incurables. Do you want to increase that number to twenty-eight?"

"You know I don't."

"Then wait."

"Wait until when?" Brenson revealed his frustration in the way he snapped the question. "Until our enemies have built their launching racks on the Moon? We have the edge on them at the moment, our ships are better than theirs, but that advantage won't last long. We must reach the Moon before they do. If we don't or if we land about the same time, then neither of us will be able to build a base. We'll be fighting to prevent each other doing the very thing we want to do. How long do you think it will take such a war to spread back to the mother planet?"

"Sending our men up to certain insanity isn't the way, Brenson. You know that."

"Maybe, but what can I do? The problem has to be solved and the men are expendable. If we send twenty up, two hundred, two thousand, what does it matter if we win in the end? What other way is there?"

"One other way." Henderly switched off the cathode screen and straightened with a protest from stiffened muscles. "I've got to find out

for myself what is wrong. Can you strip out the encelaphocardiograph to compensate for my extra weight?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"No 'buts.' I'm fit enough and I won't pretend to handle the rocket. I'll be able to watch myself, to determine what happens when and, unlike the test pilots, I'll be able to diagnose my own symptoms." He smiled at Brenson's expression. "Don't worry. I'll take precautions. When can I start?"

"And if you should come back like the others?"

"Then send up another psychologist, and another, and then another until the problem is solved." Henderly smiled as he led the way towards the door. "Psychologists are cheaper than trained pilots—and they know what to look for."

It was hot in the tiny control cabin. Henderly sat, nerves tense, flesh cringing as he waited for the moment of take-off. He was afraid, and he knew it, knew too that it was an instinctive fear of the unknown. He stiffened as a voice murmured against his ear.

"Take-off in five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . now!"

The shock was something no human or animal should ever have had to experience. It was brutal, savage, relentless in its impersonal piling on of weight and tension. Black out came just before terror, and Henderly yielded to the temporary loss of his senses with something like relief. He regained consciousness at eight hundred.

"Henderly!" Brenson's voice was strained and worried. "Come in, Henderly! Henderly!"

"Henderly here." The psychologist wished that he could have checked his own physical symptoms but, dressed as he was in the cocoon-like high-G suit, he could barely move his hands before him. "I've just come out of a black out. Altitude?"

"Eight-fifty. Can you see the dials?"

"Yes." Henderly scanned the seemingly endless ranks of instruments. Before him the winking lights of the control mechanism flashed and died as the ground pilots steadied the ship against wind thrust and lateral instability.

"The altitude dial is the one . . ."

"I don't want to know it," said Henderly quickly. "As I don't know which dial is for what I shan't know unless you tell me. Regard me as a control for human psychological reaction, not as a pilot."

"As you wish." Brenson hesitated. "How are you feeling?"

"So so. At the moment of take-off I experienced intense fear. I wanted to get out of the ship and run away from the whole project. This was probably due entirely to inexperience but it would be wise to check with other pilots. Fear is weakening." He paused, studying his emotions with clinical detachment. "At the moment I am comfortable aside from a slight headache. As the walls of the cabin are opaque I could, if I didn't know better, convince myself that I was still on Earth. The vibration is bad but is dying now that the engines have been cut. I have to keep reminding myself that nothing can go wrong."

"Nothing can go wrong," said Brenson. "We have the ship under perfect control."

"You have it under control," emphasised Henderly. "I haven't. There is a sensation of helplessness, of total dependence on others, but a normal pilot would not feel that." He shifted restlessly against his bonds. "I wish that I had more free motion."

"We had to strap you down, otherwise you would have been smashed to a pulp from the high-G acceleration at take-off." In the background a man's voice muttered "nine-seventy" and Brenson swore. "Shut up! No verbal information." He spoke again this time to Henderly. "Anything else?"

"Not yet."

It was a lie and the psychologist knew it. He felt sick with a mounting fear, but, because he was a human and proud, he wanted to hide that emotion. He wanted to appear strong and brave and casual. He forced himself to remember what he was and what he was doing.

"I am afraid," he said as calmly as he could. "It is a stupid, illogical emotion without any apparent cause. Instinctive perhaps. Stemming from the sub-conscious or from primitive racial memories. I feel trapped, bound and helpless and unable to help myself in any way. I cannot forget that I am sitting on top of a mountain of explosive which is liable to detonate at any moment. Intellectually I know that the possibility of such a detonation is low but my intellect is rapidly yielding to my emotions."

He sweated as he stared at the walls, his muscles jerking as he struggled with his bonds.

"The cabin seems to have constricted and the pilot-lights have a semi-hypnotic effect. I'm afraid that I shall fall. There is nothing I can do if anything goes wrong. I feel that I am falling . . . falling . . . falling . . ."

"Henderly!" The voice slashed against his ears with the violence of a blow. "Control yourself!"

"What?" From the soreness of his throat the psychologist realised

that he must have been screaming. He gritted his teeth and tried to control himself. It was impossible.

He couldn't help it. No one born of woman could have helped it. It was as though every cell of his mind and body screamed the one, imperative command. To escape. To get out! To save himself.

"I want to get of here," he muttered. "I've got to get out! I must get out!"

He was struggling then, fighting the swaddling high-G suit, straining to get his hands free so that he could undo the buckles. He ignored the sound lashing against his ears. He ignored everything that intelligence had ever taught him.

He had to escape.

But he couldn't.

He had to get away.

But he couldn't.

He had to save himself.

But he couldn't . . . he couldn't . . . he couldn't . . .

He didn't even notice the acrid, biting sweetness of the gas.

The hospital ward was cool, quiet, restful in its five shades of green, the plastic floor absorbing almost all sound. Brenson strode across the smooth surface and snapped at an orderly.

"Is he recovered?"

"Yes, Sir. Ten minutes ago." The orderly gestured towards a screened-off corner of the ward. "I think that he is waiting for you, sir."

Henderly smiled as the colonel stepped between the screens and sat at the side of the bed. He looked very pale and his eyes still held the lingering traces of shock but he seemed restful and coherent. Beside him, set on a couple of low stools, was a large shallow pan of ordinary garden soil. Henderly's left hand rested in the pan, his fingers opening and closing as he let the soil run through his fingers.

"How are you feeling?" Brenson made a point of not commenting on the other's strange actions. The psychologist smiled.

"I'll be all right." He lifted a handful of soil, and let it trickle through his fingers. "Don't let this worry you, I know what I'm doing."

Brenson nodded, making no comment. "The doctors inform me that, physically at least, there's nothing to worry about. You've had a shock, but you're no longer young and that was to be expected." He hesitated. "Did you . . .?"

"Find out what I was after?" Henderly stared at the grim face of the colonel. "Yes."

"You did!" Hope washed some of the fatigue and tension from the officer's face. "Good!"

"Not good," corrected Henderly. "Not good at all." He paused. "If it hadn't been for the sleepy-gas I'd be with the others now. Even then I forgot all about it, it was sheer accident that I slapped my palm down hard enough to trigger the release."

"Foresight," said Brenson. "You recognised the danger and took precautions."

"Accident," insisted the psychologist. "I tell you that I forgot all about it. I forgot all about everything up there and reverted to a creature of sheer instinct and emotion. The whole thing happened too fast for me even to relay what was happening."

"What did happen?" Brenson could no longer contain his impatience. "Damn it, man! What it is up there which causes insanity?"

"Nothing."

"What!"

"Nothing." Henderly shrugged. "Oh, the radiations may have something to do with it, some subtle influence which triggers off the emotional relapse, but, in itself, it isn't dangerous. The cause is deeper than that." He gripped a handful of soil. "The cause is within ourselves each of us and, because of that, I doubt if we will ever solve the problem."

"Are you certain that you weren't affected more than you know?" Brenson made no attempt to be gentle. "I can't read these riddles. What do you mean?"

"I'm sane." Henderly shuddered and, as he gripped the soil, his knuckles whitened beneath the skin from the force of his emotion. "I've never been anything else than sane." He let the dirt fall back into the box and stared at the colonel. "You remember a conversation we had? We were talking about a lot of things, just shooting in the dark, kicking around odd ideas and scraps of knowledge. We forgot the most important thing of all."

"So?"

"Survival. The one, over-riding basic emotion of every living thing in the world. Survival! The strongest instinct of all. Stronger even than sex which, in itself, is a form of survival. Stronger than fear or hate or love or indoctrinated beliefs. The one compelling instinct which is bred in us from the time when we first crawled from the sea, before that even, from the very first cell which ever knew life." Henderly

paused, sweating, and his left hand fell back into the pan of dirt.

"I told you that all insanity was due to conflict. That is true. Usually it is a conflict between what a man is and what he thinks he should be. It could be financial, emotional, intellectual. It could be based on opposed beliefs or warring faiths. It could even be between the flesh and the mind. Whatever the conflict, there you will find a degree of insanity. Heighten the conflict and you increase the insanity. Set a mind against a body and the body, the instincts, will always win. We cannot deny our own nature."

"But we want to reach the Moon," protested Brenson. "There's no conflict there."

"Isn't there?" Henderly shrugged. "Think again. Every psychologist knows that every man has a breaking point. We can deliberately drive a creature insane by using simple techniques. If we can do that, then how much easier must it be for nature to do it?" He reared up on one elbow. "Listen! For how many millions of years has life been on this planet? Surviving on this planet? Adapting to this planet? We can live here—just. Can we live in space?"

"With protection, yes."

"With protection, but artificial protection, not natural. Within the atmosphere the organism is still at home, still within the boundaries of Mother Earth. There is air, water, soil. No matter how fast or how far he travels he has still a chance of survival, and even then we get breakdowns. How many inexplicable accidents have there been? How many men have been sent to the psychiatric wards because they could no longer stand the pace of modern life. Why do we need both physical and mental tests for all rocket pilots? Survival, Brenson, it is the only answer.

"In space a man has no natural protection of any kind. He is helpless, impossibly vulnerable, and his every instinct screams out in violent protest at what is being done to it. Conflict, Brenson. The most vicious conflict possible. A man at war with himself, with the result an inevitable conclusion. The survival instinct will win every time. It must win. Millions of years or racial memory against a decade of so-called intelligence. Is it any wonder that such a conflict leads to dementia praecox? The man has to escape his unnatural, dangerous environment and return to Mother Earth, the only place in which he is able to survive. *But he can't!* He is strapped in, helpless, unable to obey the demands of his instincts." Henderly shuddered. "I've experienced it and managed to save my reason only because of the gas. If it hadn't been for that..."

He swallowed and gripped at the dirt.

"Therapy, Brenson. I've got to recover my affinity with the soil which gave me birth. I'm like a child which needs its mother. The planet is my mother, the mother of all of us, and we need it more than we know."

"You said that the radiations had something to do with it. If we develop a new shielding . . ."

"It may help. Other things may help, hypnotic indoctrination, pre-frontal lobotomy, usings morons, the already insane, the poor devils who are torn apart with the desire to escape from Earth itself. I don't know. But this I do know. Men, as we knew men, will not be able to reach the Moon. Not yet, not until we have managed to breed a type other than what we are. Us?" He gripped the soil and let it trickle through his fingers. "We shall not be able to go. None of us."

"We shall go," said Brenson. "It may take time and money and martyrs, but we shall go. Bigger ships, larger crews, plants, growing things there are many things yet to try. But one day we shall reach the Moon."

Henderly said nothing, but his hand closed in the dirt which had given him life.

E. C. TUBB

THE NEXT ISSUE ! ! !

In the not-so-distant future of the earth **waste** may become the most dreadful sin of all and our whole society will have to be readjusted accordingly. This is the central idea of one of the most imaginative and unusual stories we have had for some time; "Sunset" by KENNETH BULMER.

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Counterpoint

*They had^o said that danger lay in
discovery—he was soon to learn otherwise*

Illustrated by John J. Greengrass

"Hallo, Eddie. Had a good leave?" The guard on the main gate gave his pass a cursory glance and motioned him through.

"Yeah, fine, thanks."

Gregoff took back the styloed, metal plate bearing his photograph and description, and moved into the grounds of the space field. Behind him the small door set in the larger, steel gates, swung shut with a gentle clang. His heart was thumping harder than it should, and there was a tautness in his stomach which, together with a dry mouth and throat, warned him of his nervousness.

He turned the corner of a block of buildings and stopped for a minute to rest his suitcase and light a cigarette. As he held the match he noted that his hand trembled slightly with reaction, but he knew that his tenseness was passing now that the first test was over successfully. Igor Gregoff, alias Eddie Carr, spaceman, was inside the closely guarded secret known as Canada spaceport.

Gregoff picked up his case once more and walked on with the smooth assurance of one who is utterly familiar with his surroundings. Even so, his dark eyes flickered curiously and interestedly from place to place and building to building along his route, as he identified pathways and buildings from the reconstructed models and sketches that he had studied so long and carefully in Maosberg.

The Federation psychologists had been precise and thorough in their preparation.

His short, chunky form turned another corner into the wide, main roadway which led to the crew dormitories, and here his assurance almost left him. His step faltered for an instant and his lower jaw dropped involuntarily in sheer amazement. He recovered quickly, and was relieved that there was no one about to see his momentary lapse. Well briefed as he had been, and familiar as he was with the small two stage experimental rockets of the Federation, it would have been impossible for him not to have shown some reaction to the huge, gleaming cylinder which rested on four stubby rocket venturis in the centre of the great concrete apron, and some two thousand yards beyond the end of the path on which he stood.

Four hundred feet it rose into the air, glinting brightly in the brilliance of the noonday sun, save where dark patches showed open ports and cargo hatches marring the smoothness of the giant hull.

Further off again, forming part of a huge, artistic backcloth, stood four more rockets, and around the base of one of them swarmed black figures and tiny vehicles, antlike beside the looming bulk of the ship.

The quick, involuntary thrill which the scene aroused in him died rapidly under the grudging, angry hatred which burned deep within Gregoff's being. By a mere six weeks had the Euro-American capitalists beaten the Federation to the landing of a rocket on the Moon. By so short a margin of time had the fate of a world for decades been settled. By about one thousand hours—the accumulated time of a thousand idle workmen.

He had to force his mind back to calmness to prevent the angry rush of blood to his florid, deeply tanned face.

"Hi, Eddie. Glad to be back?"

"Yeah, sure. How are you, Pete?"

His response was automatic and careless despite his inner tension.

Six short weeks, and in that time the Euro-Americans had established a two man base on the Moon, not much, but enough to destroy the first Federation ship to attempt a landing. Unfortunately, the Federation hadn't known about that until a long time after. They assumed that the rocket had crashed on landing; they had no idea that the first E-A rocket to land was fully prepared to set up a base. Such a thing was quite beyond the capabilities of the decadent capitalists.

By the time they had learned otherwise the E-A's had twenty men and the base for guided missile launchings firmly established, and they had one rocket a week making the two way trip to reinforce their grip. By that time it was too late for the Federation to do anything. True,



they had threatened, but it had been only a straw in the wind, a puny gesture at face saving; the time for offensive action had passed them by.

All that had happened fourteen years ago.

Gregoff's lip curled slightly despite himself, as the frustration of his thought bred anger within him. By a mere six weeks had the Federation lost the greatest empire that Man could command—unless something could be done about it.

The peculiar psychology of the democracies allowed the Federation to exist almost unhampered. There was even trade to a limited degree between them, and tourists could be seen in each other's territories. Always, though, there was an undercurrent of suspicion which groaned and rumbled in the background, but which did not explode into a full conflagration. The Federation was not in a position to make war, and the democracies were psychologically incapable of it. And that, to Gregoff's mind, was one more indication of how unfitted they were to rule.

He turned in through the door of the dormitory building which was to be his temporary home, and made his way unerringly along the wide white corridor to the small cubicle which was his own private section of the large building. He went in and shut the door behind him.

Like everything else he had seen the small room was exactly as he had expected to find it. It was precisely as it's previous occupant had left it, and just as it had been pictured to him in drawings and by scale models.

The Federation psychologists had done a better job than they knew when they had drained the mind of Eddie Carr of every bit of information that was necessary for the successful substitution to take place. They had been lucky, too, in finding a man who was on sufficiently long vacation to make the job a thorough one, instead of the hurried botching makeshift which, at one time, they had feared would be necessary. The original Eddie Carr had three weeks leave due to him, and he had chosen to spend it fishing in the north of the Great Lakes in Canada.

Gregoff chuckled grimly to himself. Carr was still at the Great Lake—or rather, at the bottom of one of them, with two hundred pounds of concrete attached to what was left of him.

"First man I ever saw who could come back off leave with a grin all over his ugly mug."

Gregoff swung round quickly. He hadn't heard the door open, and now he found himself looking at a tall dark haired man with the lean tanned face of a space man, a face that was twisted in a reassuring smile of welcome.

"Say, did I scare you? Sorry Eddie."

Memory pieces clicked into place in Gregoff's mind like an automatic jigsaw puzzle as his brain sorted out and sifted the information given to it by his eyes. Marco, they told him, Lou Marco, his next door neighbour—He relaxed, as the identification soothed the apprehension from his mind.

"Halló, Lou. Yeah, I was thinking."

"And I'll lay odds it was blonde." Marco sat himself down on the edge of the small, divan bed. "What's new in the great big world outside?"

"Not much. It's still turning, so they tell me."

Marco chuckled. Then, "What's that scar on your neck Eddie? Did the razor slip, or was she too passionate?"

Gregoff lifted a hand quickly to the one remaining spot of evidence that spoke of the minor plastic surgery that had to be done to make him even more like the original Eddie Carr than he was already.

"No," he answered easily. "Nothing like that, unfortunately. I hooked myself with a bad cast one day." He laughed. "It was all I caught that morning, too."

Questions—be careful of questions at first, they had told him. Evade them at all costs until you are sure of your ground. A wrong

answer might slip out, and that would be the finish. Ask questions, lots of them, as long as they are not likely to arouse suspicions, but don't invite them. Above all, think before you answer any of them.

"What goes on while I've been away?" he asked, pulling at the zipper of his case.

"Haven't you looked at the personnel boards?"

"No! Why?"

"If you hadn't been due back today I'll lay even money you'd have been recalled."

Gregoff frowned as warning bells tingled along his nerves. "Oh? Why?"

"Your name is on the board along with about two hundred others for some special meeting tomorrow at twenty hundred."

"Well, well. Looks like I got back at the right time. You in on it too?"

Marco nodded.

"Good, we can go together. What's it all about?"

Marco shrugged. "No one knows. There's a top security blackout over the whole field for the next seven days as of mid-day today—that was when the notice went up."

"Mid-day, eh?" Gregoff frowned. "That was when my leave was up."

"Uh, huh. You and half a dozen others."

Gregoff was silent as he slowly began to unpack his bags. There was something in the timing of the whole thing that bothered him, but his initial tension was passing now as he seemed to be slipping easily into the mantle of the late Eddie Carr. One of the major tests had been his first meeting with Marco, and that was past. He had been in the man's company for nearly five minutes, and there had not been the slightest comment on his appearance or attitude as there would surely have been had Marco noticed anything odd. Yet now, another tension began to build within him as curiosity mingled with a nebulous something which eluded his efforts to pin it down.

"Makes you wonder, doesn't it?" said Marco. "I've just left a jostling mob around the board all making wild guesses." He grinned. "In fact, I've made a few myself."

Gregoff nodded. "Yes—yes. It must be something big—something out of the ordinary." He laid a shirt, carefully folded, on the small table beside the bed, and wished suddenly that he could be alone so that he could think about it all. "Look, Lou. How if I meet you in the canteen later on? I've got this unpacking to do, and a couple of other things—"

"Sure, sure. Of course." Marco rose, as if aware that he was intruding. "I'll see you down there. You can buy me a beer."

"Thanks. I'll do that."

Left alone once more Gregoff fastened the door and lay down on the bed with a cigarette between his lips. He puffed a long streamer of smoke towards the ceiling and watched it as it drifted lazily into a large, round, blue cloud as it floated upwards. He was more than a little worried by the sudden turn of events. Eddie Carr had been a crewman, second class, and, as such, was a skilled technician on the great Lunar rockets.

Gregoff himself had a good grounding in the theoretical side of rocket technology, and was the possessor of Asian University degrees in physics, nuclear and general, and also chemistry. He had learned enough of Carr's duties aboard the Moon ships to get himself safely to the Moon—and back—and that was all that was expected of him. His mission was in the nature of a reconnaissance. One trip out and one trip back, and then get all the information he had obtained back to his superiors. After that he was to consolidate his position as Eddie Carr and await further developments which, he had been assured, would not be long in happening. He wondered how the new developments would affect his plans.

It was suspected that the democracies had two main bases on the Moon, and the tentative plan was to infiltrate other well trained agents into Canada spaceport, with the ultimate intention of seizing control of the Lunar bound ships. One such rocket in the right hands and unsuspected, would see the end of the two bases before they know what hit them. Once that was accomplished there were twenty rockets ready in secret hiding places throughout the Federation which would be capable of establishing a base on the Moon before the E-A's had recovered. And then—

A fierce flame of anticipatory pleasure flowed through Gregoff as he contemplated the ultimate glorious future which he was helping to mould. Unless this new business interfered. He frowned slightly. Whatever it was must be important, and anything that was important was worth investigating. And then put the idea from him; he had a job to do which was far more important than any side issue which might tempt him. The whole future strategy of the Federation was based on his success in the small details which had been planned for him. Anything else might upset the whole structure of the Plan and render it useless.

Gregoff had never heard of the flexibility of instruction.

At eight the next evening he and Marco joined one hundred and ninety eight others in the body of the large main lecture hall of the space field.

On a raised platform before them sat five junior officers who flanked a white haired man in Admiral's uniform. Gregoff did not recognise him as one of the people belonging to the base who was known to Carr.

"Well, well. The old man in person," murmured Marco in an undertone, but that remark did not help Gregoff.

He contented himself with a safe, "Shows it's important."

"Too right," replied Marco.

"Gentlemen." The Admiral tapped the desk before him to call their attention. There was instant silence. "Gentlemen, you are here as a result of an instruction posted on the personnel board at mid-day yesterday. I must repeat the warning that accompanied the notice, and tell you that the whole field, and particularly this hall, is under a complete security blanket. No one will be allowed to enter or leave the field after mid-day tomorrow." He paused and smiled down at them. "By that time all of you will be on passage to the Moon."

A faint twitching of uneasiness stirred Gregoff's stomach, and around him he felt the surprised movement and murmur of the other men.

"I will say here and now," went on the Admiral, "that the project for which you have been chosen is one of the biggest that we have ever undertaken. It is also one of the most dangerous, and it will involve considerable personal risk for each and every one of you who is connected with it. Anyone who does not wish to become involved in that risk can get up on his feet and leave the hall now. Nothing will be said to him, and he can be replaced quite easily."

Gregoff looked around furtively. He had no wish to be tied up in anything containing the slightest element of risk. If one other man had risen to go he would have joined him, as it was he wasn't going to draw attention to himself by making a lone exit. No one else did move.

Gregoff sat and cursed silently while he wondered desperately how all this would affect his plans. True, his initial aim was being realised—he was going to the Moon, but after he got there—

"All of you," the Admiral was saying, "have been chosen for three reasons. First, you have all volunteered for special duty. Second, you are all specially qualified in some degree of other, and last, none of you have any close emotional relationships." He paused again. "There is still time if you want to walk out of those doors."

Still no one moved.

The Admiral eyed them steadily and searchingly for several long moments, then he smiled broadly. "Thank you, gentlemen. I knew you would not fail me. Now there are five ships waiting on the launching aprons. I expect most of you have seen them. The first ship blasts off for the Moon at midnight tonight, and the others follow at two hourly

intervals. In a few minutes each of these officers beside me will call out a list of forty names together with the number of the ship on which those men will travel. You will all be at the appropriate vessel half an hour before the zero time set for the take-off. All other instructions and details regarding the Project will be given you when you arrive on the Moon. And now, good luck, gentlemen, and—goodbye.”

The names of Lou Marco and Eddie Carr were among those to travel on the first rocket.

Gregoff died a dozen horrible deaths during the ten hour trip to the Moon. He knew for the first time just what the late Eddie Carr had meant when his tortured lips writhed in terrible incoherency as he babbled about “psychological adjustment and physical incapacity.” The finer degrees of perfection in his preparation had been lost in the need for speed in obtaining physical likeness and a parrot like ability to imitate the man was replacing, and Gregoff learned the hard way just what had been sacrificed.

His whole body was racked with the terrible agony of escape velocity as the killing acceleration of the take-off ground him savagely into his cushioned couch. His lungs were crushed beneath unimaginable pressure as he fought, unsuccessfully to draw breath, and horrible cramps raced through his automatically struggling muscles. He would have screamed had he been able, but instead he had to bear the whole torturing burden in breathless silence until, at last, the red haze before his eyes faded into the merciful blackness of deep unconsciousness.

Later, much later, he crawled from his bunk sick and weak, and found himself in a horrible world that knew neither up nor down; a world in which he floated with giddy, nauseous terror. He managed to pull himself to one of the viewports, and that terror was magnified a hundred times as he looked out on the great, dark, empty spaces of the Universe. No night was ever so black, and no pit so bottomless; no feeling of claustrophobia was ever so bad as the racked emotions he suffered during that first, shocked realisation of what he was mixing with.

He managed to struggle back to his couch, and lay there trembling, held in by the elastic straps so that he would not float away. Even as he lay there on his back, still and peaceful, the horror did not leave him, for at one moment he appeared to be hanging from the ceiling, suspended, while seconds later it seemed as if he were strapped immovably to a wall.

He slept at last, and it was the sleep which only comes to those who are physically and mentally at the end of their tether.

The landing on the Moon was not so bad, but even there Gregoff was

racked by the pains of returning weight, and after they were safely down he had to be helped from the ship by Marco, who regarded his condition with some concern.

"Say, what's got into you, Eddie?" he demanded. "You're in no condition to do anything right now. You'd best go sick."

"What?" And miss all the fun?" Gregoff protested weakly. "Be a pal, Lou, and forget it. I'll be all right."

He thought a lot about his experiences before he slept in the large dormitory which housed his party of forty. He was relieved to find that lesser gravity of the Moon was not unpleasant once he had got used to weighing about thirty pounds. The sensations which accompanied the phenomenon were amusing—but that was all. He realised that all the others had been prepared for the great adventure of space travel, and he knew, too, that it would take all his iron will to get him safely back to Earth when his mission was finished. Even the anticipation of another flight like the one that had just ended, made his stomach writhe and rumble in fear, and he shifted uneasily in his cot as he recalled the indescribable sensations of take-off and landing. The Lunar landing had been bad enough, but what would it be like to go into the Earth's atmosphere with six times the force of Lunar gravity pulling against the landing jets he dare not imagine. All he could do was to trust to his almost perfect physical condition to see him through.

For two days nothing happened. Two of the other four groups arrived and were installed, but there was still no hint as to the reason for the strict secrecy. The remaining eighty men were known to be at Base Two.

Gregoff used the time well. His almost eidetic memory noted and recorded the location of every building in relation to the others, and by diligent observation and carefully indirect questions he was able to find out what went on in most of them. First with Marco as an unwitting guide, and later on his own, he toured the whole base as thoroughly as any inspection officer. In his mind he carried a rough estimate of the number of men and the amount of material needed to maintain the base, and he tried to assess the chances of success that a small, well armed, and determined party would have if they got into position to launch a surprise attack. Of the second base he learned nothing except what he was able to pick up by listening to idle gossip among his companions. He dare not ask questions, and all he could do was to hope that he would get there eventually and have a chance to look around.

On the third day things began to move.

Marco joined him at lunch with a broad grin on his face.

"Seen the board?"

Gregoff, frowned. "No. Why?"

"Say, don't you ever read notice boards?" complained Marco.

"Not if I can help it."

"Well you'd better read this one. We're to be all set to move out at ten hundred tomorrow morning."

Gregoff appetite vanished. "Where to?"

"Second base. Apparently we join up with the other two groups there. After that—" Marco shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine or anyone else's."

Gregoff ate slowly and in silence. It seemed that his desire to look at Base Two was to be gratified, but despite his satisfaction about that, there was an undercurrent of uneasiness at the secrecy which still surrounded the project of which he was an unwilling associate.

"Worried, Eddie?"

Gregoff looked quickly at Marco, startled by the apparent intuitiveness of the remark.

"Intrigued rather," he replied as easily as he could.

"Aren't we all. There's an awful lot of guessing going on among the boys. I could get you a nice even money bet that we're here to open up a third Lunar, and a really good three to one shot that it's going to be on the Other Side."

Gregoff smiled. "Thanks, I'll keep it in my pocket," he said, but in his mind the logic of the suggestion slipped easily into place. It was clear that Base One was extended to its maximum effective capacity for economic operation, and the same was probably true of Base Two. Therefore—

"What do you think?" he asked abruptly.

"Me? Nothing." Marco shook his head. "I don't think, Eddie, I just do. I'm the escapist type—line of least resistance. What you don't think about can't worry you."

After lunch Gregoff went along and checked the personnel board for the details which Marco had left out, and he felt considerably happier about the whole thing. There was an air of quiet assumption about his companions that they were, in fact, going to open up another base, and Gregoff felt as if a load had been lifted off his mind as he probed into, and agreed with, the logic of the suggestion. He did not recognise the relief for what it really was, merely an extension of the fact that he wanted to believe the rumour.

Another problem which intrigued, rather than bothered him, now that it had arisen, was how they were going to reach Base Two. It was

fifteen miles away in a straight line, precisely in the centre of the great plain that was Copernicus. Surrounded as it was on all sides by forty thousand foot mountains, he knew that no surface transport could reach it. Atmosphere planes were out of the question, and the shortness of the distance made the use of rockets an uneconomical proposition.

The question remained to be answered.

At ten precisely next morning they marched in a double file out of the dormitory and into the main street of the Base. In accordance with the orders all of them wore space suits and carried helmets and oxygen tanks. The leaders turned into another, smaller building some fifty yards along the main street, and Gregoff recognised it as one of the few whose function he had not been able to ascertain. There, the pace slowed until they were merely shuffling along a few yards at a time.

Gregoff had to stifle his impatience and fight down a desire to ask where they were going. Marco seemed quite at ease with what was obviously a familiar procedure, and the other men around him reacted in exactly the same way. As they entered the building the two men directly ahead of Gregoff donned the large, plastic global helmets, and Marco did the same. Gregoff followed his example, and as he did so his apprehension mounted, for it was clear that they were going outside the base.

A few moments later Gregoff was one of a party of ten who shuffled into an airlock. They stood there for some seconds in silence save for the hiss of the pumps as the air was withdrawn, and then the farther doors of the lock opened and they stepped into a large elevator. It took them down two or three hundred feet as near as Gregoff could estimate, and at the bottom two doors opened out into a huge domed hall carved out of solid rock. In front of them stood a train of five open cars, and a single rail stretched away towards one end of the cavern where a small, oval tunnel showed black against the luminescent rock.

The problem of how to reach Base Two was solved, and Gregoff entered a few more facts in the catalogue within his mind.

From the brief glance he had of it an hour later Gregoff could see that Base Two was almost a duplicate of Base One. At any rate, the general layout appeared almost identical.

They reached the surface by way of another elevator and another airlock, and it was with some relief that Gregoff was able to take off his helmet, and dispel the slight feeling of claustrophobia which it had induced. An officer led them straight to a large assembly hall where they found the remaining eighty men already waiting their arrival, and the excited good humour as the two groups merged was silenced a moment

after it started by the arrival on the stage at one end of the hall, of a tall, blond man in a spacesuit.

There was instant silence as he stood before them, a lean, tanned figure who commanded attention even though he was standing alone for several seconds without speaking.

Then he smiled down at them, and said, "Good morning, gentlemen." His tone was warm and friendly, and it put them at ease right from the start.

"My name," he went on, "is Stewart, Peter Stewart. Some of you may have heard of me." He smiled again, gently, as if he had made a rather poor joke. There was a loud buzz or surprise and speculation, a rising tide of tension about the assembly which even Gregoff shared, for there was no one present who had not heard of Colonel Peter Stewart, the most famous trouble shooter since Columbus.

As a callow, twenty two year old lieutenant Stewart had landed the first rocket on the Moon more than fourteen years before, and, though he had shunned publicity to an almost hermit like extent, his exploits had continued, ever since, to reach the public ears to a general chorus of excited adulation.

Gregoff felt the tension in the rest of the audience; it pervaded the whole hall with its subtle emanations, for here was yet another clue to the importance of the project on which they were engaged. Apprehension mingled with anger and frustration as Gregoff saw that his own plans were rapidly being lost beneath a tide of efficient secrecy. His anger generated a hatred of the tall, blond man on the platform before him, for here was one of the men who were almost directly responsible for his uncomfortable position today. Fourteen years before Stewart had prevented the Federation from fulfilling its destiny, and now the wheel had come full turn. Stewart was involved once again in the frustration of plans which had been long and carefully prepared to make up for that earlier disaster.

Gregoff forced himself to calmness so that he could concentrate on what Stewart was saying.

"There has been a rumour," he told them with a slight, wry smile, "that our task is to establish a third base on the other side of the Moon." He paused, his eyes flickering with maddening, tantalising good will over the assembly. "Well, that might be so, were it not for one very good reason. Base Three had already been established."

The final statement was flat and humourless, and it brought a startled overtone of conversation from his listeners, which swept round the hall in waves of amazement and incredulous speculation.

Marco whispered, "Good job you kept your cash, Freddie."

Stewart waited until the buzz had died away, then he said, "And it is on the Other Side.

"And now," he went on, "I'm going to ask Professor Wallace, who is the chief physicist with the expedition, to tell you what it's all about."

He stood to the back of the stage, and beckoned to a man who was out of sight at the front of the audience. Gregoff watched as he stood up and climbed the three steps up on to the platform.

He was a grey haired, stooped figure of around forty, with a lined face which cracked in to a thousand crinkles as he turned and grinned broadly out at them.

"Colonel Stewart's trying to push the baby on to me, I guess," he began. "But I'm going to disappoint him. I'm not going to deprive him of the honour of telling you what it's all about. All I'll say is that we are trying to do something, out there at Base Three, which is the biggest step forward that Man has taken since he exploded the first atom bomb. It has been going on for over six years, and today it reaches it's climax. On you depends the success or the failure of this whole project. To all of you it will be a challenge, and for some of you it will mean death." His eyes were dark and sombre as he looked out over their serried ranks, and the silence that greeted his words was the silence of a tomb. "All we have been able to do is to prepare you, each and every one of you, as thoroughly as we know how both physically and mentally. Your psychological preparation has, if anything, been even more thorough than your physical, for we know very well what a man can stand in the way of physical hardship. The psychological aspects are something else again, and some of you have been given specially devised therapy although you may not realise it. In several cases it has meant killing spells of duty, hard and remorseless, in others it has meant long periods of rest and inactivity. In all cases it has been carefully worked out so that every man can give of his best when the time comes."

He straightened his stooped shoulders and drew a long breath. Then, "The time has come, gentlemen." He turned, "And now—Colonel Stewart."

As Wallace spoke Gregoff sat and listened with mounting horror. He recalled Eddie Carr's incoherent babblings about the total elimination of psychological faults. He remembered his earlier speculation about the timing of the start of the project with the ending of his leave. It had all fitted too neatly, but at the time there had been too little for him to go on. The very fact and reason for Carr's lengthy leave had been ignored as an unnecessary incidental under the stress of more important things.

The Federation doctors and scientists had paid no attention at all to



the psychological aspects involved in the substitution. All they had wanted to know were the intimate details of Carr's life and movements, his contacts and friends, his work, and abilities. They had not been concerned with his mental outlook, or whether he had been scared of the dark as a child.

Perspiration was wet on Gegroff's forehead as he waited for Stewart to speak.

"I was hoping," began Stewart, with his characteristic, wry smile towards Wallace, "that Professor Wallace would relieve me of the task of telling you the sordid details. However—" He shrugged. "Gentlemen, we are preparing for something which Man has dreamed of for centuries. We have been preparing, as Wallace has said, for over six years. Out there, on the plains of the Other Side, we have been building no fewer than ten great rockets, each of them three times the size of those which are operating on the Earth to Moon run."

He paused and there was a great hush of expectancy over the whole room, an electric tension of eagerness as one hundred and ninety nine men waited with breathless excitement for his next words.

Gregoff sat paralysed with fear.

The imponderable variant, which had been nebulous as "the Project," crystallized suddenly in his mind as some intuitive heightening of perception caused by his emotional instability told him the answer even before Stewart spoke the words.

"We are going to Mars."

The silence was broken only by a long, low sigh, like the soft stirring of leaves beneath a tiny summer breeze.

Gregoff dared not lift his head for fear that those on either side of him should see the stark terror which he knew disfigured his face. His hands gripped each other in a perfect frenzy of fear lest their trembling be noticed, and deep within him there was an empty pit of despair as his plans crumbled around him.

He felt once more the crushing acceleration as they left Earth, and the horrible, empty, bottomless free fall that knew neither up nor down. The darkness of space closed over him as he shut his eyes in an effort to push away the horror which threatened to overwhelm him, for he knew, with agonising finality, that, one way or another, his death was not very far away.

Dimly, he heard Stewart's voice as he repeated softly, "Mars."

There was magic in his voice as he said it, and then there was another long pause as he seemed to savour the sound of the single pulsating syllable.

He went on again, more briskly now that the surprise was out. "In about half an hour we shall be going down into another underground monoway, and in three hours we shall be at Base Three. We shall rest there tonight; that is," he grinned "if any of can rest. Tomorrow, at oh eight hundred, the first rocket will take off. All ten ships will make the trip, and each one will carry twenty men as passengers and crew. Mars is in opposition at present, and the trip should take about three weeks. Once the expedition has been landed all but three of the rockets will be broken down and used to establish a base that will be manned by fifty men. The rest will return in the other three rockets."

He paused again and looked at the floor as if uncertain how to go on. Then, "Some of you may be wondering why so many men are going and so many are coming back. The answer is simple. There will be casualties; we hope, not too many, but we must allow for a computational loss of fifty per cent for one reason or another. In theory, every ship and every man should come through safely, but the conquest of the Moon taught us that in practice that will not be so. At all events, that first base must be established and capable of supporting itself for at least six months without outside help. By that time, within three months, in fact, a further group of ten ships, already under construction, will carry

further supplies and materials necessary for the establishment of the colony on a permanent basis. Mars will not be like the Moon. It will be far too costly if we try to send two or three expeditions to reconnoitre before we decide what to do. The first attempt must be the successful one, there won't be any second chance for decades to come if we fail."

He stopped and coughed slightly, his eyes roved, lingering, over the hushed, tense audience.

"That, gentlemen, is the plan in broad outline. Given good luck it will be possible: given secrecy we can have a permanent base on the Red Planet before anyone can tell it is possible: given courage we shall carry it to a successful conclusion."

It was almost an anti-climax as he stopped speaking, and called another man diffidently up on to the stage. It was doubtful if anyone in the audience remembered the man's name afterwards, they only knew that he was short and stocky, with a brief, nondescript moustache, and a few sheets of paper which he rustled importantly.

"Full details will be circulated before you leave for Base Three," he told them. "Take off time for the first rocket will be oh eight hundred tomorrow, and thence at hourly intervals until seventeen hundred. As soon as you have been given your instructions you may go through the door at the side of the stage, here, to the right. That will take you to your temporary quarters. That is all."

All around him Gregoff was aware of a meaningless jumble of conversation, of voices pitched high with eagerness and excitement, an overall cacophony of sound which beat through his being, clamouring along his jangled nerves and increasing the frantic urge he felt to stand up and run. Dully he heard Marco beside him, jubilant, ecstatic almost, in his enthusiasm.

"Say, Eddie. Isn't it great? The first men to reach the planets. Think of it, our names in all the history books."

"Not mine," said a voice deep within Gregoff. "Any name but mine. Eddie Carr's name—not mine."

His hand was cold and nerveless as it grasped the sheet of white paper which was thrust into it, and his eyes were utterly incapable of deciphering the printing on it. The hall around him was a pandemonium of sight and sound, an artist's study of wildly excited emotion.

Gregoff dropped his ashen face into one shaking hand, his senses reeling beneath sheer terror and hysterical denial as he tried to shut out the awful horror of his situation.

He sobbed once, a piteous, lonely sound.

There was no hope. The trap was perfect and complete.

LAN WRIGHT

Mansion Of A Love

*The processing chamber offered a new outlook
on life which brought happiness—of a kind*

Illustrated by Harry Turner

I praised her new hair style and she said, yes, it was "nice," and Marie had charged only ninety-five bucks. And I winced.

I said her afternoon frock was beautiful and matched her eyes, and she said: "Yes, it's nice. It should be. It cost a hundred and fifty."

"And what price do you set on your eyes themselves?"

She used them to convey that she didn't understand the question but she did sense its motive. She reproached, without saying a word: "You're getting at me again, Bob."

"You seem to have a price tag for everything," I explained, "Have you one for me? What do you think I'm worth, Moira?"

The golden eyes lost focus. They were surveying some extra-dimensional account sheet. Then: "Around one million, seven hundred thousand, Errors and Omissions Excepted."

The devil-child of cynicism in me, which had thrived on disillusionment since my return from Moon Base, scoffed in my mind: "She was only an accountant's daughter . . ."

Aloud, I asked: "And what's my worth to you?"

"Have I underestimated? Is it more?"

"You forgot the three bucks returnable on the beer bottle empties."

She looked sad. "Bob, that childish malice will make things difficult for us. Why not speak to father? He'll arrange a room at the clinic—free. Processing takes only a week."

"Processing," I said, "is something they do to cheese. I happen to be made of flesh and blood."

"No bones?"

That sudden spark of the impish schoolgirl I had left behind me lit the tinder of hope again. There was momentary warmth in her gaze.

If warmth comes, can love be so far behind? That old glint stabbed like a diamond splinter at my heart. Impulsively, I embraced and kissed her with passion.

She submitted. That was all. She submitted. A somnambulist could have responded no less.

I let her go and, pitifully inadequately, attempted to stem returning despair with a cigarette. I stood with my back to her and puffed smoke at the window and its picture of the South Bank trees. A shining pleasure barge was just leaving for Hampton Court, and I could hear distant laughter. I wondered whether I should ever laugh freely again.

It had to be faced. Moira could play Mozart for me, admire the sunset with me, joke with me still in her kittenish fashion, and bear my children. If that was all I wished of a wife, she would be the perfect partner. And, of course, it wasn't all.

She asked: "You still wish to marry me? I have waited three years."

"So have I, Moira. But I haven't changed."

"Am I unacceptable, then, because I have? Why? The change is for the better. I've matured. And father has doubled my dowry—a hundred thousand bucks."

"Father!"

"You could tolerate him before, Bob."

"Before—yes," I said. "Till Father, by addition me of thee defeated. Why couldn't he have left you as you were?"

"He gave me serenity. I had seldom known it before. If you wish to speak to him, he's waiting in the library."

I crushed the cigarette and felt it sting my fingers. Irritated, I flung it through the open window. "All right, I'll speak to Father."

He sat there among two thousand books he hadn't read. He was still gross and his skin more blotchy than I remembered. It was incredible that he had any connection with the fragile and lovely Moira. He was pencilling figures on his blotting-pad and totting them up—just for the sake of it, I guessed. He went on doodling, keeping his regard on the pad because he was sensitive about the cast in his eye, and asked soberly: "Yes or no, Bob?"

"Frankly, no, Mr Bensted."

"Does that decision reflect on me at all?"

"I don't quite understand."

"Is it that you don't fancy me for a father-in-law? You don't like me, do you, Bob?"

"I don't like your *sort* of people, Mr Bensted, I'll admit. People who think in figures rather than words. Who respect only the Almighty Buck. Who seem now to have taken over this whole world."

"Is that what drove you to leave this world?"

"No, Mr Bensted, it was quite a different sort of driving force. You wouldn't understand it."

He raised his head. One eye met mine and the other seemed to be looking past me. His smile was twisted by the scar crumpling his left cheek. He was abominably ugly.

"Seeking the isles beyond the sunset, eh? Ulysses reborn. The unconquerable soul of man mounting on wings of fire to the Moon. But wings of fire aren't produced just by words, Bob. Someone had to figure the cost and find the money. Someone had to figure the *materiel*, figure the take-off speed and the landing speed. Or did the meter-dials in your ship have no figures?"

He scored there. My resentment simmered but was wordless.

Bensted resumed doodling and spoke now as if he were addressing himself. "I know we accountants are disliked—no, loathed. Yet through the centuries we've been invited, indeed, begged, to take the seats of power. We were always the industrialists' champions against the rapacious tax-collectors, for we could fight them with their own weapons—figures."

"From my study of the period," I said, "I saw no division between your houses. Social parasites. Gangsters with ledgers. It amounted simply to the truly creative people having to pay you protection-money against the other brigands. Your rotten standards have spread like a mould over the world. Moira has come to accept them while I've been away. Once she wanted to marry me because she loved me. Now she thinks the marriage a good idea because our joint cash will make quite a pile—and bucks are power. The hell of it is that I still love her."

Bensted said in an undertone: "Unrequited love isn't enough, Bob, is it?"

"It's misery."

"And for me," he said, cryptically.

"Let's get to the real point. Why did you loose that quack, Baum, on her with his fool gadget? What exactly has he done to her mind? What are you and he after? Why are you backing him? This 'processing'—people seem to regard it as a sort of mental vaccination. Against what? Or is it a fad? I was out of all this—up there."

He rolled the pencil between his fingers. "The real point? You've raised half a dozen points jumbled together, like a child who wants everything at once. Typical—the emotional, confused thinking of the

romantic. The kind that had us muddling into war after war. I've fought against it all my life. Sneer if you like, but the accountant stands for ordered thinking. He wants a world where the books balance and the people at large balance also. Maybe *he's* the romantic, for the reality is far from his desire. Here we are, God help us, bumbling like a litter of eager puppies. Physically, we have one foot on the Moon. Emotionally, we have both feet stuck in the mud of immaturity."

"If Baum's gadget has made Moira mature," I said, "then, indeed, God help us."

"The adult idealist is a realist," said Bensted, abruptly. "Baum is one. So am I. I subsidise his clinic because I think his work may yet avert another war."

"War? About what?"

"Fear and hate—which is but fear in a mask—find their own reasons, Bob. And there's a deal too much hate on the rampage now. Sometimes I think xenophobia is a recurrent brain fever. Did you know the wave pattern of hate can be clearly identified by the electro-encephalograph?"

"So?"

Bensted delved in a drawer and laid a photograph on the corner of the desk. "Here's an example."

I looked at the record of the mazy motions of the electrical rhythms of a human brain, but it meant little to me until Bensted traced with a finger the pronounced fear-hate characteristic.

"And here's the patient after Baum's treatment."

In this photograph the wave forms were noticeably shallower. There were no wild zigzag configurations.

"How's it done?" I asked.

"Mostly by plain suggestion, repeated in the old Coué way. Though I believe Baum also uses a drug at one stage which dates back to the sinister brain-washing techniques. Also there's some assistance from a sort of electro-encephalograph in reverse which weakens the hate rhythm by emitting an opposing phase. But the main approach is the induction of a hypnotic sleep, and through it, for hours at a stretch, the tape-recorded voice of the hypnotist repeating 'I do not hate anyone, I do not hate anyone'."

"Rather a negative approach, isn't it? Why not a positive suggestion, say, 'I love everyone'?"

Bensted's uncoordinated gaze wandered away. "I asked that, too, Baum said it might mean the breakdown of the conception of justice. 'I love everyone' could mean 'I love murderers, adulterers, sadists, thieves . . .' He said he was like a surgeon removing an appendix or



some such natural growth made obsolete by civilisation. He didn't presume to *plant* anything."

I said: "I don't suppose I know any more of psychology than the next man, but I have heard of Freud. And the memory of ambivalence is true by my experience of life. Intense love can change to intense hate in a flash, because love and hate are two sides of a coin. One turn of the coin and the obverse becomes uppermost. Or, if you like, they're the warp and woof of life. I don't see how you can separate them. If you extinguish hate you also extinguish love. That's what you and Baum have done with Moira. If you didn't realize it at the time, I'm sure you've realized it since. Haven't you?"

He didn't answer.

"You've taken from me the only girl I ever cared about, and you condemn my bitterness. I wonder if you suggested to Moira that I needed treatment—to remove that bitterness? Now you want the whole world to go through this sausage-machine. Then you'll feel safe. You'll have prevented a war of bombs and no-one will hate you any more. You'll be surrounded by people so indifferent towards each other that most of them will never make love. Probably their only passion in life will be a collecting mania—collecting bucks. All existence will become a game of poker until the players die off."

Silently Bensted lifted the photographs and slid them into the drawer. I had been pacing about, gesticulating like a stage prosecutor, and now I could see into that drawer. It was crammed with bric-a-brac in neat order: a baby's rattle, a golliwog, a doll, an abacus, albums, film and tape spools, books . . . He made no attempt to hide them. He sat there like an incurious stall-holder, the array before him

"I presume you're an adult, realist sentimentalist?" I said, cooling down. "Those are souvenirs of Moira as a child?"

"Up till the age of fourteen."

"Only until puberty?"

"Only until she did this to me." He touched his puckered cheek.

"Moira?" Incredulity confused my thoughts, and they stumbled without direction.

"I divorced her mother, and she worshipped her mother," said Bensted. "You're right about ambivalence. Moira's love for me changed to hatred overnight. It remained so. The love never returned."

I said haltingly: "This Baum business . . . How far is it basically just a personal matter between you and her?"

"I don't know. I just don't know. Have I been fooling myself—rationalizing—about the wider project to bring settled peace to the world? To me the world's mind *is* sick and disordered. Maybe you fellows opening up the roads into space have a truer perspective than us here awash in red and black ink. My personal experiment was partly successful. Moira hates me no longer. Her indifference isn't pleasant, but I can bear it. Sorry I've doomed you to share it."

"Can Baum reverse the process?"

"Perhaps. If I give my consent. But why should I?"

"You wouldn't ask that question if you really loved her," I said, standing over him. "You'd want her to be happy, whatever it cost you. But your type must always count the cost, mustn't you? For every debit entry there must be a corresponding credit entry—else the system falls down and there is chaos."

"She's happy enough," he said obstinately. "She has nothing to worry about."

"Nothing. And nobody to care about."

He was silent. I reached past him and plucked from the drawer the play programme that had caught my attention. I had recognized the school crest. I looked at the cast and the date before Bensted snatched the vellum sheet back.

He said in a harsh tremolo: "If you aren't going to marry Moira

then you'd better leave."

"I am going to marry Moira, and I am leaving. It happens that I've been reminded of an old friend of mine whom I think will help. I'd say he's a romantic too—and yet more of a realist than you and certainly a more competent psychologist than Baum."

On the way to the door I took from the two thousand volumes the one I needed. "May I borrow this for a while?"

Bensted didn't answer, and I closed the door upon his perplexity.

Moira was waiting with an unflattering patience.

"I don't suppose many girls of fourteen have played Juliet," I said.

She answered composedly: "As Juliet was fourteen, it seems just the right age. But I remember thinking how lucky I was to get the chance."

"Do you remember how you *felt* the part?"

The golden eyes became vague again.

I said quietly: "I've an idea it was an emotional peak in your life."

Her hand closed slowly as though it were trying to grip a piece of the past.

"Would that I had been there to see and hear you," I said. "Could you give me an echo from it? Would you read this passage?"

I indicated it in the book. Gradually her attention grew upon it. She began to read, tonelessly at first, then with feeling slowly infiltrating.

*"Come, gentle night,—come, loving black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.—
O, I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it . . ."*

She lowered the book and looked at me with wonder. She repeated: "'O, I have bought the mansion of a love, but not possess'd it.'"

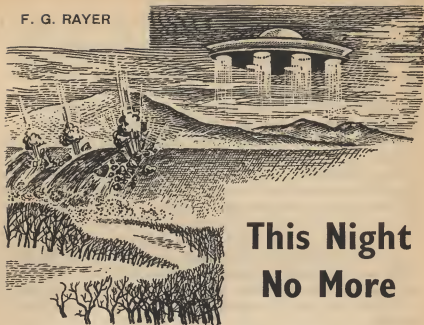
And this time it was spoken from memory—an old memory that had not been uprooted, but only pruned, and again would grow, perhaps stronger than before, if it were well tended.

Of what avail now all the gadgets and panaceas and the conniving of the small souls who were afraid of life, who sought to snare and pacify the tempest with nets of string? I felt at my side the friendly presence of Shakespeare, who had dwelt among men for five centuries and yet would outlive the Baums and Bensteds. He knew—none better—of Time's erosions. But also he knew the strength of the heart's affections, and with his help I would win back Moira.

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE



Harry Turner '55



This Night No More

*Earth lay devastated by a cataclysmic war—the remnants
of mankind desperately facing an alien invasion*

Illustrated by Harry Turner

Immeasurably huge, the alien ship rested suspended on hazy beams of violet light, while electronic rays scanned the bomb-ravaged terrain five miles below. A glow appeared at her stern, and she began to drift westward, maintaining the same altitude as her speed increased.

Inside the ship silvery screens showed the scene below. Hill and valley, river and forest, slipped by, broken with almost mathematical exactitude by giant depressions—brown, torn craters where nothing grew. At the edge of one hollow rested tumbled debris which might have been the constructions of a civilised race. The ship sank lower, hovering above the mound. For a long time beams scanned the irregular heap. Then the ship moved on. If artifact the mound had been, its builders were long since gone. Bushes hid the rubble; trees grew tall and strong over it, except on the crater rim, where they were twisted and short, with yellowing leaves.

The ship passed on and a narrow sea slid away behind. The earth below was wooded, the browns and greens of autumn marked only by the

eternal craters, white here with thrown up limestone. The ship halted and signalling antennae upon her back began to radiate urgently towards the void above, where the earliest stars shone remote and dim. Infinitely far, other questing ships heard, and changed their course, driving in upon the planetary system whence the message came.

Darkness hid valley and hills when the alien ship began to drop earthwards on her violet beams. The beings within her felt hope. The fleet of which the ship was one had travelled for many years among the galaxies; had travelled on and on again, solitary, when the fleet separated so that each ship could search alone. Below, at last, was a planet that could become home. And one where there was no apparent intelligent life which might contest sovereignty. . . .

Ashley Traderson stood at the mouth of his cave with his lips tightly compressed. Twenty-eight, nearly six feet, and well built, every line of his body told of determination. He turned his grey eyes upon the old man at his side, and his brown, strong-muscled face was hard from his inner fury.

"And has not it always been that the son should have the land of his father?" he demanded.

The old man nodded. "That is the custom among us."

"Then why not this time?"

The old man shrugged. "I am not a lawmaker. Were I, the land would be yours. Your father came among us from elsewhere, and that is the reason given."

Ashley stifled his retort. Old Doc Melvil was not a lawmaker, as he said. The injustice was not of his causing.

"So you don't think it fair," he said.

The other shook his grey head and his face was stern in the low evening sun. "No. But it is not for me to say. They say you are son of the trader, and have no place here——"

"It is one man alone who says it," Ashley accused.

"Perhaps."

"Then I can beat him—kill him!"

Doc Melvil's hand came upon his arm. "You know you cannot. His word is the word of a lawmaker. When I mend men's broken bones I see much of how their minds work. If you try force, you will fail."

Ashley turned his gaze down the valley. Trees lined all its upper slopes. In one place among them was a heap which old people claimed had once been a city, their fathers said. Ashley did not believe them.

Digging amid the brambles and bushes only brought to light rubble fit for nothing. Now, with winter coming, the ruling that he, Ashley, son of the trader, was no longer owner of the plot lower in the valley was more important than legends of lost cities.

"It is Rimaster who wants my land," he growled.

"Perhaps."

Something in the word made Ashley examine the other's face. Old Doc Melvil was always fair—had been a sound adviser before.

"You want to help me," Ashley said.

"Among other things. Not until this moment have I been free to speak. But now nothing holds you here." A gesture took in the cave mouths, the tilled plots, so painfully reclaimed from woodland. "There may be truth in what the grandparents of the old ones said. If there was a city on the hill, what of the people who built it? And what of the legends of death from the skies, raining night and day with a great noise?" He sighed. "I have travelled, and have seen and heard many things. There are fifty of us in this valley all told. Once, I believe, may have been many more—five hundred, even perhaps five thousand—"

Ashley felt disbelief. He could remember when there had been fewer in the valley. Moreover, a man could travel for many days and see no single person. He laughed.

"The world is as it always was!"

"Who can say?" The sober tone neither denied nor admitted his statement. "But I have heard of a place where other men live—men with ancient knowledge, who call themselves the wise ones. You should seek them. They may intermediate in this quarrel. More, they may tell of things you do not guess."

Ashley was silent. To him, the valley and the wooded hills were all the world. He knew nothing beyond them—and scarcely wished to know. Yet the other's words stirred a deep curiosity.

"The wise ones?"

"So an old man said. He died, telling me. He had travelled far, for one so aged." Dark eyes, keen as a young man's, came upon Ashley. "You will go, son of the trader?"

The sun was going. Wind chill with coming winter sighed for a moment in the cave mouth.

"I will go," Ashley said at last. He saw, now, why Doc Melvil had come to bring the news of the lawmakers' council. Without land, a man was free to go elsewhere. . . .

Melvil nodded. "I believed you would." He pointed into the fading light of the setting sun. "It is a long way—I will tell you—"

Ashley woke with the dawn wind rustling the trees above. He rose, slung his rough pack over a shoulder, and gazed round to take his bearings.

He had never been so far this way before. The cave village lay four days march behind, and the trail had brought him across a narrow ridge of debris at the upper side of which a lake extended. Ahead were the two rock pinnacles for which Melvil had said he must look. Staff in one hand, he began to descend.

The valley was narrow, here. Near its bottom was a level strip of some hard, smooth material such as he had never seen before. Wondering, he followed it for twenty paces, when it ceased abruptly amid bushes. He began to ascend the other side of the valley, choosing a path threading through the clump of trees.

The far rim of the valley gave a broad view in the early sunshine. Tree-tops extended all across the slopes, except for a point near the horizon on his left, where the jagged brown outline of a crater cut through the green. It would be one of the evil pits where nothing grew, Ashley knew. Bushes and grass strove to creep down into the pits from their rim, but failed, dying stunted and yellow. The old men of the cave village said that men who walked in them—or even near—died, too. Ashley believed them. He had observed that no bird or animal lived in the craters, and that no growing thing found tenure there. On dark nights, when moon and stars were hid a faint ghostly green radiance shone in the hearts of the pits.

His gaze travelled slowly along the horizon and returned to the crater. It was by no means the first he had seen. There were two over the hills beyond the caves. But for the first time he wondered at their cause, if they had one. It seemed impossible that they had been *made*, he thought. Rather must they be natural creations like the hills and streams, clouds and moon.

"You're a stranger here," a soft voice said.

Ashley turned quickly, gripping his staff. A sandy young man of perhaps thirty-five, moderately built and with humorous blue eyes, regarded him from the edge of the trees.

"Thought I knew most of the people of these hills," he said.

Ashley relaxed at the tone of friendship. "I am Ashley, son of the trader. Some call me Ashley Traderson."

The other smiled. "A village dweller. What was your father's name?"

Ashley thought the question pointless. "Hugh."

"That all?"

"Hugh the trader."

"I see. That all you know?"

Ashley frowned. "Should there be more—?"

"It does not matter. The other came across the turf. "I am Martin Kinnaird. Tell me, are there many in your village?"

"A great number—fifty." Ashley thought the figure impressive. It was more than any village he knew—more, indeed, than a man might encounter in a month's hunting away in the other direction where the craters were fewer.

Kinnaird did not look impressed. "So few." The words were half to himself. He gazed at Ashley frankly. "What brings you here?"

"I seek those who call themselves the wise ones. I wish to find if there are such men, and if they can prevent the lawmakers taking away my land."

Interest showed on Kinnaird's face. "Who told you of these—*wise ones*?"

"An old man who tends our sick. Is it really so?" Ashley felt extreme curiosity. It over-rode even his anger that if he defied Rimaster or the other lawmakers they could take his life. "Are there wise ones? Or is it a legend, like the houses on top of ground?" He laughed shortly. It had always seemed very foolish that anyone might live on the surface, exposed to rain, wind and snow, when caves in plenty existed in the solid ground.

"There are many things in our past that are not—legends," Martin Kinnaird said slowly. "But perhaps we can speak of that later." Something seemed to be upon his mind. His face was serious, his voice uneasy. "Have you seen anything *unusual*—?"

Ashley thought back. "A flat surface, in the valley——"

Kinnaird shook his head quickly. "Not that. It was a road. Anything else."

Ashley wondered at the strange word, and what the purpose of the "road" could be. The flat expanse seemed singularly useless. But Kinnaird's expression was frank, his aspect friendly, and he was clearly unconcerned by it.

"Nothing except that?" he pressed.

"Nothing." Ashley wondered why the question was so urgent, so vital.

Kinnaird looked relieved. "Perhaps there's nothing, after all." His voice was low and he became lost in thought.

"You will not let the lawmakers take away my ground, or kill me if I disobey?" Ashley urged.

The other seemed to have forgotten. "We'll see. But we do not usually interfere in tribal law."

"It was my father's ground before me——"

Kinnaird was not listening. "Look," he breathed. He pointed. Far away to the left, almost upon the rim of the crater, a shape had appeared. It hung for a moment as if suspended from the sky, then slid down over the rim of the crater. Ashley had a momentary view as of two long arms reaching out, scratching at the torn brown earth, then they disappeared.

"So there is something," Kinnaird breathed.

Ashley looked at him and saw his face was white. He wondered what the object had been. Too far to distinguish, it had clearly been of considerable size.

They watched for a long time, but the object did not reappear. At last Martin Kinnaird turned his intent gaze away, down into the valley.

"There's only one thing for it, son of the trader—we must go over and see!"

"But the pits kill men!"

"So do other things."

The ridge decreased in height until the outline of the crater was no longer visible. Ashley studied his companion. Kinnaird was not of heavy build, but looked capable of pushing on all day. His clothing was less shapeless than that of the cave dwellers, and more finely woven. He was quiet, intelligent, self-reliant.

"What is the purpose of the —— road?" Ashley asked abruptly.

The blue eyes flashed at him momentarily. "It has none, now. Many years ago people travelled along it."

Ashley felt the reply explained nothing. "How many of you are there?" he asked.

"Too few. Not a score."

"You live in caves?"

"No. One day you may see."

They trod rising ground under trees and the scene opened out anew. Right was a steep drop with a wide, swiftly-running stream. The stream came through upthrust rocks which Ashley could just discern as lying at the rim of the crater. To cross to the other side of the valley, where the object had appeared, they would have to ford it.

Kinnaird shook his head at the suggestion. "Look at the banks, son of the trader."

Ashley did. The stream made a brown weal. No plant grew in the rippling water, or within the distance of two paces from its edge. The

nearest vegetation was stunted and unhealthy, contorted saplings and bushes with light yellow leaves. Ashley felt his nerves creep.

"It is poison from the crater——?"

"Yes." Kinnaird's voice was bitter. "You could call it that. Probably a powdered isotope meant to be scattered over many square miles."

Ashley sensed that questions and explanations must wait. As they could not pass through the stream, a long detour lay ahead. They went on and he realised that the hills round the caves were much more friendly. There, birds nested and animals moved in the undergrowth. Here, nothing stirred, as if all living creatures shunned the place, some instinct warning it was evil. From one spot a view of the inside of the distant crater was visible, and something glowed there, forming the core of a scar over which hung a faint blue luminosity. The stream flowed from the scar itself, percolating through torn rock strata. Kinnaird said something inaudible, gazed at it a moment, then went on. His face was bleak, suddenly hardened as by inner suffering.

Hasty movements sounded in the bushes and Ashley halted, grip tightening on his staff. Branches were pushed aside and a face looked out—a girl, breathing heavily, eyes wide in terror. She paused as if on the point of flight, then stepped from the bushes. Ashley saw that she was trembling. Slender, agile, with a mobile face, her golden hair was in disorder and her fear manifestly great.

"T-they were—following."

She looked back, listening. Her voice was musical, afraid. Kinnaird's expression showed that he did not know the girl, and Ashley touched her arm.

"We're friends. Don't be afraid."

Her gaze conveyed her thanks but the drawn look on her face remained. "There were so many——"

"So many what?" Kinnaird asked quietly.

She looked at him and her lips trembled. "I—I don't know. I've never been this way before. I lost my path and slept in the forest. When I awoke they—they were in the trees above me."

Her voice shook and she put both hands to her face. Ashley patted her trembling shoulder.

"What is your name?"

She gazed at him through opened fingers. "Lilowen, daughter of Bate, but——" Her eyes turned back towards the trees. "There were so many—so many. At first they did not seem to follow me. Then they

did. I hid in bushes. When they went away I ran, but they must have seen me——”

Ashley smiled. “We will help you, Lilowen Bate.”

The golden hair shook in a quick negative. “You could not! They were so many—and so high among the trees——”

Her self-control went and she began to sob, crouching on the ground like a terrified child. Her wiry frame, her quick eyes and clear voice—all spoke of self-reliance and hardihood. Ashley wondered what she had seen to cause such dread.

“Perhaps we should get under cover,” Kinnaird suggested.

With easy swiftness Ashley picked her up. Her limbs trembled in his arms and she clung to him. They crept under low bushes against rocks on the hillside and Lilowen became still and quiet.

“*What followed you?*” Kinnaird asked quietly.

She was silent for long moments. “I did not see well—I was too startled, too afraid. They moved quickly, silently, like—like nothing I had seen before.” She paused, staring out from under the curtain of leaves. “I—I’m sure they won’t have given up the search so easily. . . .”

Over the ridge of the hills the searchers floated at tree-top height, passing and repassing over the spot where the creature had seemed to be. Their senses strove to locate her, or to discern any minute time-space distortion which would show a solid object moved within the area they searched. The world below was strange, and their unease great. Twice their leader returned to the place and time where he had first sensed her waging movements, and twice he failed to keep the trail. Time flowed round him, and he lost her again, and then a second time. Awareness of his failure passed to his companions, and from them came the thought that she had escaped.

The searchers became still, striving together to analyse the space around and below. But knowledge of their defeat drifted soon into their minds. Below was much movement, slight, repetitive, baffling—analysed at last into swaying and fluttering of a thousand branches. And from far away, where the crater was, extended a force that was almost as of a distortion of the spatial continuum itself.

Side by side they drifted over the ridge of the hills. If an object moved they would know. Space was distorted by its presence, and movement a rippling like waves on water. The flow of time itself gathered where objects were, fluttering moment upon moment like crossing threads when objects moved.

Only after a long time did the searchers drift away. In their minds

was a warning engendered of the strangeness of the planet they had found. But meanwhile work more urgent, more vital, waited.

Lilowen Bate looked out from under the branches. "They haven't followed me," she said. "We'd have seen them by now."

She crawled out stiffly and Ashley and Martin followed. Ashley wondered what Martin Kinnaird thought. He had questioned Lilowen for a time, then some sixth-sense had seemed to warn them to be silent and still, though nothing had moved in the narrow strip of sky visible through the fronds. Lying there, his mind had gone back to Rimaster's injustice. Without land a man was a worthless wanderer. Ashley's spirit rose in inner fury each time he recalled how Rimaster had cheated him. Nothing but Doc Melvil's counsel had kept him from open defiance of Rimaster's words, consequences be what they would.

"We intended to go right round to the far edge of the crater," Martin said.

"To discover what is there." The words had a clipped, hard ring. Never before had Ashley seen Martin Kinnaird's face so set with a determination which killed even the humour of his eyes.

She stared at him. "You suspect—something?"

"I do. An old man was out this way a week ago and returned with a garbled story no-one could make into sense. It was that brought me along these hills." Kinnaird's tone was decisive. "Old Samul has been a fool—but never a liar. Some men might invent such a story, but not Samul—he hasn't the brains."

Ashley looked from one to the other. Lilowen was small—only a girl—but brave. Martin's face showed he would go alone, if necessary. Ashley shrugged, eased his pack so that it lay comfortably upon his shoulder, and took up his staff.

"We will go," he stated simply.

Cold rain that might proceed snow was falling when daylight began to fade. The detour was proving long, and Ashley realised that they had spent more time hiding than they had supposed. They ate from his pack, rested, and went on, talking little.

Soon it was so dark that walking was difficult and Martin halted.

"We'll camp for the night."

Lilowen's face showed as a pale oval. "We're not far from where I slept."

"We can keep watch," Ashley pointed out. Attempting to press on could only be dangerous.

They found shelter under thick trees and settled down to wait. Ashley

felt sleep impossible, and he sat staring into the gloom, which slowly deeped into total darkness out of which pattered the chilling rain.

"Who is his old man you call Samul?" he asked once.

Martin Kinnaird stirred, unseen in the dark. "One of us. Aged, but not given to imagining things." His voice dropped. "His story fits in pretty well with what Lilowen told us."

Silence followed and Ashley guessed that they slept. The time went slowly. Once he thought he heard a low, distant humming, but could not be sure. The sky was starless and black, the presence of the branches above known only by the patter of rain on their leaves, and though the humming seemed to come nearer, then recede, nothing showed. He shivered, wishing dawn were nearer.

The rain ceased while it was still dark and the drip of moisture around them stopped. On the stillness came a sound that made cold fingers move along Ashley's spine. A *whoop, whoop* as of a long, tight string being twanged, it went on and on, its distance and bearing impossible to decide.

"There *is* something," Martin whispered. His breathing was uneven near Ashley's ear.

Movements sounded, and Lilowen's voice. "*What is it?*"

She crept near them. They did not answer. Sometimes the hooting faded almost to inaudibility; sometimes it increased to a twanging with a strange, unnatural intonation which froze Ashley's limbs. With extreme relief he saw the sky was lightening with dawn. As it did the whooping died away in silence.

Lilowen hung back when they rose and stretched. "Must we—go on?" she asked.

"I think so." Martin bit his lips. "Just to make sure."

Ashley judged it near noon when they approached the last rise beyond which the crater lay. Martin halted.

"There may well be danger. If so, it's foolish for us all to expose ourselves. I shall go alone. You two wait here."

Protestations died on Ashley's lips. Kinnaird was right. He was, moreover, the self-appointed leader, and probably best able to assess what he saw. They stood under trees, watching him until he was gone from sight. Ashley examined his companion frankly. The colour had returned to her cheeks and her beauty was undeniable. Her lissom slenderness pleased him, and the quick intelligence of her clear eyes.

"You were travelling alone?" he asked.

The golden hair bobbed. "I have been alone this many months, since——"

She hesitated and he knew she was thinking of her father. There seemed nothing he could say. As they stood in silence the bushes were opened with scarcely a rustle and an old man stood before them. Wizen, slightly bent, his eyes were nevertheless bright and told of no failing wit.

"The Sentinels are too close here," he stated factually.

They stared at him, astonished at his silent approach, his appearance, and his words.

"Sentinels?" Ashley found his voice.

"Aye. I call them that because they're always watching—watching." He seemed to find some secret joke in the word.

"*Watching?*" Lilowen's voice shook. "What?"

"Just—watching. Everything."

Ashley felt a chill similar to that which had come with the whooping drumming. "Where?"

"Over by the crater."

They looked that way and saw Martin hurriedly descending the slope. Ashley was startled by the whiteness of his face, by the tremble of his lips, not wholly hid, and by the expression in the eyes that would not meet his. Instead, Kinnaird's gaze settled on the newcomer.

"You here again, Samul."

"Aye. Been warning this pair that the Sentinels will likely enough see them."

Martin Kinnaird did not question the name, obviously not new to him. "But it was not that that brought you, Samul."

Samul scratched the side of his nose. "Things that watches others ought to be watched themselves."

"And why do you think they're—watching?"

"'Cos that's the way it strikes me. Sentinels they are—watching. Though that's as much as I or any man can say. They sees us, too. They saw me. When I ran and fell and knocked me head I thought I was finished. But they never came any nearer, as I told you."

"Is it—safe to stay?" Lilowen's voice suggested she believed it was not.

Ashley looked at the brow of the hill, and at Martin, and an almost unendurable curiosity burned within him.

"You saw these—these *Sentinels*, Martin?" he breathed.

Martin drew in his lower lip. "I saw them. More, too. They're—building——"

"*Building?*" Samul's voice shook.

"Yes. What, I don't know. I couldn't see everything. It wasn't safe." Suddenly he appeared to reach a decision. "Everybody must be

warned! I can go to our folk. Ashley Traderson must go to his. Everyone must know—and soon! ”

Ashley looked at the hilltop two hundred paces ahead. “I should see for myself——”

“There’s not time! It would do no good—might endanger us all.”

The words seemed final in their obvious truth. Ashley strove to quell his desire to see what the others had seen—to *know* for himself.

“I—I have no standing in my village,” he pointed out. “I own no land, am not a lawmaker.” He knew, as he spoke, that he must return. Something lay beyond the hill—and that something threatened them all.

“I will come with you,” Lilowen stated simply.

They mounted the path to the village together. The cave mouths were even rectangles just large enough for a man to pass. Some people said the caves themselves had been made by earlier generations, but Ashley did not believe that to be so. They were of an even, stone-like material, and extended into the hillside. They were warm, dry—and there was the old folk’s story, gained from their grandparents, that it was safest to live underground. Those foolish enough to live on the surface all died, the story said. Fires like blue sunshine burned from heaven to earth and consumed them.

“Will they believe you?” Lilowen asked.

Ashley’s grey eyes were troubled. He was, he admitted, better at fighting than at using words. But determination and purpose were not lacking.

“They must do so, Lilowen.”

“And if they do not?”

He did not reply. Doc Melvil had appeared at one cave entrance, recognised him, and waved. Behind him came a heavily-built man of thirty, dark haired, with a wide face scornful yet surly. Ashley’s grip unconsciously tightened on his staff. This was Bernard Rimaster, who over-rode others with a roughness based on self-esteem.

“You look angry,” Lilowen murmured.

They reached the level before the square-cut entrances. Rimaster stood unmoving in their path.

“I had not expected to see you back, Traderson.”

Ashley’s anger simmered up anew. Behind Rimaster, Doc Melvil shook his head slowly, as if understanding and counselling peace. Ashley halted.

“I wish to see the leaders and lawmakers.”

“I am both.”

Ashley knew he must be content. If Rimaster provoked a row it would not be he who would be thrown from the village, as the contempt and triumph in his hard eyes showed.

"Very well. Something threatens all of us——" As Ashley spoke he decided that Rimaster was not believing him, but instead supposing the whole a fabrication. There was open hostility in the hard eyes when he had finished.

"How could such things be?" Rimaster demanded.

"I don't know. I only know they *are* there——"

"You have seen them?"

"No. but——"

Rimaster laughed. "If this is some plan to get me alone in the forest, you must think me as great a fool as yourself! You are angry because my justice is not to your liking. In the forest a lawmaker might be struck down from behind, and no one know his slayer——"

"It was not justice, and it nothing to do with this!" Ashley snapped. "If you fear to go alone, send whoever you choose."

Colour came to the other's wide face. "And have them return naming me a fool for believing?"

He turned on his heel and disappeared into the cave. Doc Melvil watched him go, then fixed his kindly gaze upon Ashley.

"There is truth in this story, son of the trader?"

"In every word I have spoken. Strange things are there, though I myself have not seen them."

"And you think them dangerous?"

"Without doubt."

Melvil's grey head nodded. "And if so—if it is as you say—what can we few score poor villagers do to prevail against them?"

A shock ran through Ashley. *What could they do?* Nothing, he thought. *Nothing.* And not until that moment had he realised it!

"We—we are not beaten yet," he said gruffly.

"Perhaps only because the battle is not yet joined."

They gazed eye to eye, the words sinking in. Voices came in the entrance passage and Rimaster appeared with three men. Spirits sinking, Ashley recognised them as lawmakers who would say and do as Rimaster wished. The four together could carry through any aim in the council of seven.

"It is indeed Traderson," one said.

A second nodded. "We do not want him here."

Rimaster smiled to himself. "He should be banned the village?"

"Of course," the third agreed. "He is a troublemaker."

Ashley's lips set in a thin straight line. "At least send someone to see that what I say is true!"

"And appear as fools?" Rimaster scoffed.

Three heads nodded. "It would be foolish to go."

Ashley pointed to Lilowen. "She saw! She will tell you also!"

The first man pursed his lips. "Without doubt you have told her what to say."

The second shrugged. "We are leaders and lawmakers and do not believe the words of women——"

The third nodded soberly and Rimaster grunted with satisfaction "It is as I thought, Traderson. We are not fools, nor to be tricked."

"Indeed not," the third said.

Fury burned through Ashley. His grip tightened on his staff, but a hand came on his arm.

"You must go, it is the only way." Melvil's voice was kind. "Remember your visit has not been wholly useless——"

Not trusting himself to speech, Ashley turned and went down the path, conscious that Lilowen followed. Rimaster's voice drifted loudly after him.

"You are banned this village, son of the trader, it is our judgment——"

Ashley did not look back. Face set, he strode on. If men were to band together to save themselves, each hour counted. He could only hope that Doc Melvil's saner council would find hearers in the village.

"Do not hurry so," Lilowen complained.

He halted, smiling crookedly "Sorry. It is trying to parley with fools. We will rest when we reach the other side of the valley."

As he walked he wondered what plan could be prepared. One thing was clear—he himself must see what had occupied the area by the crater, so that he could judge the danger. He must also find Martin Kinnaird, and enlist his help.

The combined plan eased his sense of frustration, and they sat on a felled tree to eat. Far away, across the valley, the mouths of the caves where had lived so long were just visible, but no one could be seen. The folk of the village were at work, or within, sheltering from a wind that was cold despite the weak sun.

Later, they rose and went on. Low clouds were bringing darkness early.

"You are content to stay with me, Lilowen?" Ashley asked.

She examined his face, her clear eyes searching. She nodded. "Yes, I will stay with you."

"I know a place on the hills where we may find good shelter."

They turned that way, climbing still. The vale below was full of dim shadows, details lost in a monotone of gloom.

"Your friend was right, saying we can do nothing," Lilowen observed.

He looked at her in the dusk. "We can try. Why suppose we shall be defeated when we do not even know our enemy?"

"You are brave. But I—I have seen them."

She would say no more. Soon they reached flat ground near the hilltop and Ashley looked back for a last glimpse of the fires which sometimes burned before the caves so long his home. He halted, unconsciously gripping his companion's arm.

The caves were invisible, but from a dip in the skyline he knew their position. Three luminous bodies hung there, seemingly poised on hazy beams of violet light. Moving slowly in formation, the shapes passed over the village, swung slowly round together, and floated again over the spot.

"You are hurting my arm," Lilowen said.

He released her. "You see them?"

"Yes."

"It was from them you ran?"

"Oh, no. These are different—and much, much bigger."

Her voice sounded very small on the open hilltop. The shapes began to rise, ascending until their height must equal the distance across the valley, he judged. Remoteness made their form indistinguishable. Abruptly they vanished, passing through the low clouds. For a moment the hazy violet pillars upon which they floated were visible, then they too vanished.

"We should—hide," Lilowen whispered.

Ashley found the spot he sought—a shelter of stone slabs under trees, built by someone who had long needed it no more. Tired, cold, they lay down and slept.

They arose at the first light and struck a direct route across the hills. Ashley hoped they would make better time, with the way now known to him.

Once they rested at the barrier of rubble which held a vast lake at its upper side. If such things had been possible, he would have assumed that the barrier had been built for that very purpose, and still well fulfilled it, despite being crumbled as by a great shock. Yet, he thought, it was obviously foolish and impossible that such a wall had even built

by men. From its far side he studied the configuration of the hills, to choose their way, and decided that the valley below the barrier was the very one in which the strange things seen by Lilowen had taken up lodging. Only a double fold in the hills, which made the valley snake back upon itself, had concealed the fact.

"We may be there even sooner than I supposed," he said.

It was scarcely noon on the next day when they emerged into sight of terrain he recognised. With excitement he knew that he could soon be overlooking the rim of the crater itself. Soon, at last, he must *know* . . .

They emerged on to more open ground and Lilowen gave an exclamation. "There is someone——"

She pointed. Away along the grassy slope a figure was half crouched, lying as if protecting itself with one arm. They hurried, and Ashley recognised the man as old Samul, oddly twisted up and utterly still. At a few paces distance he halted, a sudden chill, physical in intensity, running through his limbs, his gaze frozen on the old man. Arms, head, body and legs were covered with conical depressions, each exactly similar, the width of two thumbs side by side, and half as deep. Mathematically exact, the conical holes went through clothing, skin, flesh and bone. Each was true as a scribed circle.

Ashley walked the remaining steps jerkily, and touched the old man's shoulder. The body fell over like a doll. Face and chest were the same, and Samul was dead.

Biting his lips, he turned Lilowen away. Her eyes sought his. There was terror in them.

"It was the things I saw . . . He must have come back."

He could only nod. The manner of Samul's dying was more frightening than any signs of battle or violence could have been.

"We—we must not let them catch us," Lilowen whispered.

He awoke again to full realisation of their own personal danger. Samul had been old, but strong and quick. Their danger was very real.

Snow was beginning to fall thinly and Ashley wondered what he should do. In the face of this new discovery it seemed unwise to seek pointless exposure to danger, or to leave Liloewn unprotected. Better that they try to find Martin Kinnaird, warning him and his companions.

"It—seems unwise to stay," Lilowen said.

"Yes." He scanned the hills, estimating the possibilities of a search in the direction from which Kinnaird had come. If the snow thickened visibility would be poor and his eyes clouded. "We can do no good here."

They began to hurry through the flakes which had begun to dance upon a chill, rising wind. At last Ashley recognised the spot where Martin had first met him. From there it would be largely guesswork.

Lilowen halted, pointing. "There are a lot of people beyond the trees——"

He stared through the drifting snow. It thinned momentarily again and he saw that she was not mistaken. Men, women and children, in compact file, carried bundles of every description. He recognised Rimaster, Doc Melvil, and several others, then the flakes drifted thickly again.

Lilowen looked uneasy. "What does it mean?"

He frowned. There seemed only one explanation—the villagers had flown from some danger accompanying or following the appearance of the three objects over the caves. The danger must have been very real, to make them leave home and shelter so suddenly, in such weather.

"I fear they've had proof of the truth of my words," he said.

He felt in no mood to meet the oncoming group. Some of its number might think he had betrayed the way to the caves, even if unknowingly.

He took Lilowen's hand. "They may not be friendly—but we can travel faster than they."

They hastened, and though he often looked back, no glimpse of the party came through the thickening snow. With an instinct developed from boyhood he maintained his direction, while bushes, trees and hill-sides began to disappear under a uniform white blanket.

"You are strong, daughter of Bate," he said once in admiration as the distance grew and they surmounted a steep rise.

"I have always lived in the forests."

With nightfall the snow ceased and a half moon showed the way. Though weary, Ashley felt it best not to stop. A higher hill was visible ahead and that should be their objective. So still was the air that even their own voices seemed unnaturally loud.

His first survey from the hilltop brought disappointment. Fold upon fold of snow covered slopes stretched to the limit of seeing. Then, as he looked again, a clear spark of light showed away beneath them. It burned steadily, then went out.

"We will go that way," he decided.

They descended in the ankle-deep snow. After a time the light showed again, then vanished. They corrected their direction and Ashley felt triumph and hope returning.

At last they reached a pole upon which a globe stood. Even as he gazed up at it it was illuminated, then extinguished. Footsteps came in

the snow behind them and a man appeared from an opening between rocks. He paused.

"You are strangers!"

No enmity was in his voice. Ashley nodded. "We saw the light——"

"It is a signal so that the search party may not mistake their way. They are out looking for an old man."

"Samul," Ashley interjected.

"That is his name——"

"We found him—dead." He explained quickly. "You know a man called Martin Kinnaird?"

"I do." Comprehension was in the voice. "You are the pair he spoke of! You must go below. I must stay here to wait for the party. Give Kinnaird your news."

"We can only guess what it was like originally," Kinnaird said. "Three hundred years is a long time. Surface buildings were pushed flat. Time and nature has done the rest, up there. The casualties must have been terrific. Probably radioactive dust and famine killed those who escaped the actual attack."

Ashley was astonished. Steps had led down into the network of underground chambers and passages. Globes like that on the pole lit them and it was impossible to imagine they had been fashioned by nature.

"Other areas suffered worse treatment," Kinnaird said. "We've put together as much of the story as we can. When the first bomb was dropped governments were terrified and sent up everything they'd got. When the panic was over it was too late. A hundred years of arming had made every nation an arsenal. Where blast and radiation didn't kill, radioactive dusts did."

"You mean—there were once many more people?"

"Undoubtedly." Bitter sadness was in Kinnaird's voice. "It doesn't take long for nature to cover things up, once man has gone. Trees and bushes, grass and rubbish, creep in. They have done so above. A city was there—once. Three hundred years ago. The old maps call this area Wales. It escaped lightly."

Ashley repeated the word. It was a strange name. Yet his friend's words fitted well with the old legends of the village people. Old men related tales their grandfathers had told them—as a child, he himself had loved to listen. Fantasies of great buildings and many people; of vehicles that rushed across land and sea; of seeing people at a distance,

and of a sudden cataclysm which had destroyed it all.

"There were other deep shelters," Kinnaird said, and began to follow the passage. "Most were probably empty—there was no time for the people to reach them. We believe the exits of some were stocked high with preserved food. Others were bare. It was civilised mankind's great act of suicide."

The walls of this place, as Kinnaird led him through it, were of the same stone-like material as those of the caves where the villagers had lived. Nearly all the rooms were empty.

"All the food must have been eaten in the years following," Kinnaird remarked, "and everything which would burn used for fuel. That is probably why there are no doors, no furniture. Not even beds. When everything was gone, the people left." His tone was expressive. Thrown on their own resources, the survivors would not have found it easy. "Naturally we have no traces of them. Presumably this place was left empty for a long time. We found it nearly ten years ago, quite by chance——"

"You are not—not like we villagers and hunters," Lilowen said, her eyes upon him.

"No. Our fathers had lived in a shelter away to the south-west. We would have stayed there, but it was near a river and flooded when rain was heavy." He opened a door of tarnished metal. "Fortunately there was a small section of this shelter which no one ever entered—it was locked off, fireproof and reached by this way only."

Inside, Ashley marvelled at the things their ancestors had had and used. Many were of unknown purpose. Others were built up of many thin sheets covered with symbols, some of which he had seen the old people scratch in the dust, urging the children to remember them.

"It is little enough—too little—upon which to build a new civilisation," Kinnaird said sadly.

Within twenty-four hours Ashley found that he had accepted a host of new facts. Never before had he imagined that mankind had passed through so terrible a night, such as could have eclipsed all human striving for ever. From Kinnaird's words he gathered a picture more terrible than any the old men had told. Graceful cities had trembled into dust and the wheels upon which civilisation ran were stilled. Diseases created by man for the destruction of his fellows had joined with famine and humanity was nearly ended. Deadly gases and dusts were carried upon the winds of the world and in distant lands the innocent died without knowing why. *Black, dark, evil night of man*, Ashley thought, *humanity*

had fallen headlong into a dreadful pit of its own making.

Slowly out of the great shock there arose in his mind a new and powerful determination. Men must build again, not losing everything of the glorious past. For glory there had been—the glory of worthwhile achievement, the nobility of human ideals at their best. At all costs things of such worth must be regained.

He went up out of the deep shelter, alone, and stood in the snow, ankle deep and untarnished under a leaden sky. It was easy to hope, but difficult to plan. One thing was clear. If danger existed from the things that had killed old Samul, then they must be overcome. In no circumstances must they jeopardise the pitiful remnant of mankind that survived.

Voices came over the snow, and he saw that the search party had at last returned. Word passed between them and the man who met them as they came closer. They were weary, cold—and manifestly the bringers of bad news.

“We found him—dead.” The words drifted to Ashley and he wondered what they thought of the manner in which the old man had died. “Gill and Rudge went over the hill—and didn’t come back——”

They were closer, the expressions on their faces clear, now. Tired, puzzled—*afraid*.

“You searched?” he asked.

They looked at him. “No. Not after we had looked over the hilltop. It grew dark. We waited that night and the next day—but neither came back——”

The fear was mixed with despair and intense fatigue. Heads bent, the tiny party filed away into the entrance. Ashley’s gaze followed them from view. The haunted tone of those last words rang in his mind—*Not after we had looked over the hilltop. . . .* He compressed his lips, clenched his hands in the pockets of the strange but comfortable clothing Kinnaird had given him, and wondered why those two had not come back. Gill and Rudge. Unknown to him, never seen, their disappearance suddenly seemed as the personal loss of irreplaceable friends. It was damnable.

He went down into the shelter and met Lucan Talbot, who had first greeted them under the guiding light. Talbot was slight, quite short, quiet, and perhaps twenty-five, Ashley judged. It was difficult to be sure—privation left its mark early on some.

“You’ve heard two of the party didn’t come back?” Talbot asked.

“I have!” Ashley felt the blood tingle in his cheeks. “You don’t realise the value of what you have!” he declared. He made a sweeping

gesture. "You're used to it all—take it for granted. I don't! I've come in from outside, where such things were not even imagined. Don't you see what it means?" He gripped Talbot's arm. "It's all a reminder of our past! And what men have been once, so can they be again. We must fight, plan, build."

Lucan Talbot's eyes held understanding. "I suppose it would strike you like that, coming in here for the first time. But it's not so easy to do——"

"I never supposed it would be easy," Ashley stated. "Mankind didn't strive in the past because it was easy, but because it was worthwhile!"

"Perhaps," Talbot said quietly. "We've done a great deal—salvaged past knowledge, studied useful technical processes—and it's not been simple. There's been no one to show us—it's been re-discovery."

Ashley smiled. Talbot was right. Nevertheless, his own enthusiasm was not quenched.

"First, we need to know why Gill and Rudge didn't come back," he said. "If there's an actual threat, we need to know what it is. Only then can we hope to overcome it." He hesitated. "I can have several days' food and outdoor clothing——?"

"Certainly," a new voice said. Martin Kinnaird came up the steps. "I heard much of what you said, and agree with it all. But, as Lucan pointed out, it's not easy."

Ashley met the clear blue eyes and knew that he had a sure friend in Martin Kinnaird. Kinnaird's knowledge was immeasurably greater than his own. It was inevitable! Kinnaird had grown up with a background of learning; was highly skilled in knowledge of minerals and mining. Yet Kinnaird had never looked down upon him, instead accepting him as an equal friend.

"I can try," Ashley said.

Kinnaird nodded his head. "But not alone. Two heads are better than one, and two may live where one may die, when trouble comes. We'll go together."

Ashley felt a surge of warmth. "Soon——?"

"As soon as preparations can be made."

Leaden skies overcast the landscapes with gloom so that the obscured horizon blended with the heavens. Night promised to come soon, starless and cold, and a thin wind made a faint moaning through the trees. Martin Kinnaird gazed through binoculars at something half a mile away down the side of the valley. At last he put the glasses away.

"It's impossible to say what it is."

To Ashely's unaided eyes the object that had halted them under the firs was a tiny, faint blue patch. Motionless, it glowed with its own light.

At his suggestion they went slowly down the hillside, keeping behind cover whenever possible. The blue object did not move. As the distance decreased Ashley began to feel a new unease. The dimly radiant patch was perhaps three paces in diameter, and covered by an absolutely spherical dome high as a man's chest. The blueness was not of the dome, but of things inside.

At last they stood behind the nearest bushes. After a long time Kinnaird pushed the glasses into his hands.

"What do you make of it?" His voice was husky.

Through the strong lenses the scene leapt near. The dome was transparent, wavering. Scattered inside was a score of objects—if objects they could be called—which each glowed weakly blue. Ashley ran his tongue over his dry lips, studying them. Each was no larger than a man's fist, transparent and vibrant, yet definite in outline. The earth upon which they rested was pressed flat and hard. In some unfathomable way the whole reminded him of one thing only—a nest.

He gave the glasses back and went out from behind the bushes. There seemed no personal danger—and his curiosity would have been stronger than his fear.

The dome shimmered on the whole of its surface. When he was a single pace from it the pulsating blue objects suddenly awoke from their stillness and crowded away back into the dome, drifting, glowing, pressed compactly there as if afraid. He raised his staff and struck. The stout ash met nothing. Nor did it penetrate. Level with the dome's surface it ceased to exist, and he was left with a short piece of wood held foolishly in his hand.

He jumped back, and the faintly radiant objects spread out, resuming their positions. Ashley felt a tremble run through his limbs. If the young of beings unknown they indeed were, they were not unprotected. . . . When he stepped towards the nest again the things it shielded did not retreat.

"It doesn't seem safe to stay in the open," Kinnaird's voice warned him.

They went back up the hillside, taking a path that would bring them to the slope from which they could overlook the crater. It was a long way, and as they trudged on in the increasing gloom Ashley wondered time and again of the significance of what they had found. The

first impression that had leapt to his mind remained. A nest, strange, alien, protecting the embryo beings which occupied it.

They rested for a few hours, sleeping fitfully, when the darkness made progress impossible. With complete stillness came again the remote *whoop, whoop* that went on and on, so strange and unearthly that for a long time Ashley sat with his chin on his knees and his eyes wide open, gazing into the blackness. With the first barely visible lightening of the sky, he rose. Kinnaird stretched at his side.

"The more we find the less I like it," he said. His tone told that he had slept little. "We're so few—so helpless."

"You believe something unusual is here—the Sentinels, as old Samul called them?"

"Without doubt. And I'm afraid of what the outcome for us all may be."

They picked their way among trees seen as shadows against the whiteness. As it grew lighter snow began to fall again, thick and direct from a windless grey sky. Ashley decided that this time nothing should prevent him seeing over the hill. Yet they must not forget that soon they would be treading the way Gill and Rudge had taken, and that neither had returned.

It was wholly light when away behind sounded the whip and crack of branches thrust aside and a horse and rider came out from the belt of trees they were skirting. He reined in, his black stallion sweating and breathing twin plumes of moisture on the cold air. Ashley judged him tall, but he was stooped now over his horse's neck, and lean as a stick.

"Praises be," he said with feeling. "'Tis ten days since I saw a living man."

Ashley wondered at his age. His build was that of a man of thirty-five, yet his face lined as by the passage of fifty summers spent in the open. He wore no hat. A pack was on his back and two others across the rump of the horse.

"You've travelled far?" Kinnaird said.

"I have—and scarcely expected to see a living man again! Nor I think did Pat me horse, judging by the speed he's made!" He stroked the horse's neck. "Only them things like back there—" He jerked his head the way he had come. "Pat wouldn't go near though I've never seen 'im afraid of anything afore."

Ashley realised his meaning. "You've seen the—the dome?"

"Aye—and a score more. Dotted all about the country, they are." He bent low, reining the stallion about with one hand. "What's more—I've seen one open."

"Open?" Kinnaird's tone had an odd ring.

"Aye—open. Nigh big to overflowing in it the things were." He snapped his fingers. "Click, just like that, the dome thing was gone. *We're off, Pat*, I says. But swift as anything all the things in it rises straight up to the sky. In moments the lot was gone in the clouds, the whole shoal of 'em. And that's not all——"

The black stallion pawed the snow. He quietened it, looked back into the trees, and seemed to shrink even lower into the saddle. His face was that of a man who had slept little for many nights.

"Tell us all your know," Kinnaird suggested. "You need rest—sleep. We can help."

The horseman nodded. "Folk call me Jan of the Downs. This is strange country to me. But when things like this happen, men need to be together. Worst of all was the object I saw two days ago, strange beyond description——"

"There was something else?"

"Aye—and big enough for Pat to enter, though terror wouldn't let him go near." Jan screwed up his face in an effort of self-expression. "Strange beyond reason. There—yet not there; hurting my eyes to look. You've gazed in a stream an' tried to see your face? One moment maybe it's there—then 'tis all ripples making nonsense of trees and sky. Strange—aye, strange." He relapsed into moody silence with his chin sunk on his chest.

"You could show us where this thing is?" Kinnaird asked.

"Aye, simple enough." His eyes fixed upon them. "Many a man can live without rest—but not without food, an' a man who's fleeing because he's afraid of solitude makes a poor hunter——"

He ate what they gave him, not dismounting, intent only on the food. Every movement suggested he often lived, ate and slept in the saddle. When he had finished he wiped his mouth with the back of a hand.

"Aye, but an empty stomach makes a coward of a man," he declared.

Kinnaird smiled faintly. "You're welcome to stay with us and live at our camp."

"That I will, and thanks," Jan said feelingly.

"And this thing you saw?"

"I can show you. It's not so far. Pat and me have been a rare long way round, an' doubled back, too, when I thought I saw a camp fire this way."

"Perhaps that was the people from the caves," Ashley put in.

"That I don't know. The snow came too thick and I lost it." He caressed the black stallion's neck. "Want to go now?"

Ashley remembered his original plan, and his determination to see what manner of thing had taken up abode near the crater. He shook his head. This time, he was not to be turned aside.

"Later," he said.

Jan seemed content. "Aye, then I'll rest." He dismounted stiffly, looping the rein over an arm.

Ashley turned his face again towards the hill slope beyond which was something seemingly more strange each day. This time there would be no turning back, he thought.

From the top of the hill the drumming *whoop, whoop* was audible, even though a light wind had arisen and was beginning to carry snow thinly along the wooded slopes. Ashley walked in cover, listening often, and a chill of inner origin could not be wholly dispelled from his limbs. The trees were thinner towards the skyline, the undergrowth more sparse, offering less concealment, yet an expanding view of the scene beyond.

No snow lay on the crater's lip, or within a long way of its edge. He had observed the same phenomenon elsewhere in earlier winters. Presumably there was a slight warmth, generated of some atomic process still active after three hundred years.

Inside the inner edge of the crater a yellow glow rose and fell, oscillating ceaselessly in an unchanging vertical line. He watched it in astonishment for a long time before he realised that its rise and fall was simultaneous with the *whoop, whoop* that went on and on, and that the glow disappeared into the earth itself at the lower limit of its travel. Up, it was twice as high as the tallest tree, half lost in the obscured sky. Down, it was gone for the space of an inheld breath, and around the point of its disappearance lay a huge pile of turned-up earth.

A hand came upon his arm so unexpectedly that a shock ran through him.

"Is it—*mining* for minerals or ores?" Maritn Kinnaird whispered.

With its whooping twang the radiance rose and fell, and Ashley could imagine its progress deep down into the earth so that it was hidden for at least half of its vertical path. And the great mound circling the point of its disappearance seemed to be of fragments drawn up by it. It seemed possible that the glow, whatever it was, could indeed be fashioning a vast shaft or pit.

Near the foot of the mound was golden dome so vast that it spanned half the crater. If beings there were, they were concealed beneath it and no further movement told of their activities.

As he stared the snow thinned for a few moments and he saw that

the whole rim of the forest beyond the crater had been cleared. Half projecting from the trees was a long, blue-silver object cylindrical in form with a conical end. Its stern was lost in the trees, through which it seemed to have crashed with a force that had split the thickest trunks like green twigs.

"That was—hidden before," Kinnaird whispered.

Snow came on the wind and the scene was obscured. For a few moments the glowing orb could be seen rising and falling in its great trajectory, then even that was lost to sight. Only the distant *whoop*, *whoop* told of its unceasing activity.

Ashley moved stiffly and withdrew among the bushes. After this, he could believe all Jan had told them, even to the large, strange object they had not yet investigated.

As he walked beside the horse Ashley wondered what the activity in the crater portended. He half expected a drove of some strange shapes to rise up in pursuit of the humans who had come so near, but no sound or movement disturbed the sky. Later, perhaps, such sallies would begin, when the camp under the golden dome was consolidated. Plodding in the snow, he wondered what hope there could be of prevailing against beings who controlled such unknown scientific might. His mind dwelt on possibilities of defence and attack, and all seemed futile. At the most they numbered a hundred souls, including the villagers from the caves.

At length he saw that Jan was leading them towards the wall of rubble he and Lilowen had traversed on foot. The horse stepped warily and the waters at their flank were high.

"Probably a dam, once," Kinnaird remarked as they went slowly across the ridge. "Possibly suffered a near miss—enough to shake up the whole construction, yet not enough to destroy it."

Ashley gazed down the side remote from the artificial lake. Cracked, covered with glass, it was nevertheless singularly even,

"Aye, I've seen it's like afore," Jan stated as he let his horse pick its own way to solid ground. "When the snow melts it'll be running over, most likely."

Ashley eyed the expanse of water, stretching up the valley to the limit of visibility. He remembered the double curve in the valley below the dam, and the crater they had left so much lower down. . . .

"If this wall could be destroyed, the water would flood the crater," he said abruptly. Excitement rose within him at the thought. This, perhaps, was a way the humans could achieve victory. . . .

Kinnaird halted and looked back, turning. "You're right!" His face was animated. "The water would rush down the valley—would

certainly flood the crater and dome! Yet could we do it?"

He walked quickly back to the edge of the dam, examining it. He moved earth and rubbish with a foot, bent, stared over the edge into the valley below, and rose.

"Possibly we could," he said with growing conviction. "It looks to me as if the dam was concrete, and badly cracked throughout by shock—probably when the water was low. Probably the water only rose slowly over a long period, as plants blocked the cracks. I'd say that there's little more than the grass and rubbish holding it together now!" He estimated it with his eyes. "Working together, twenty men might breach the top. The water would do the rest—the pressure must be enormous."

"Aye, that's as may be," Jan said. "But I've been ten days in the saddle——"

"I was forgetting." Kinnaird's voice was invigorated as by inner hope. "Show us what you saw. We can look into this after. Perhaps we could get together explosives——"

Ashley did not question him. He wondered, instead, where the villagers from the caves had settled. In the valley, for shelter? They would have to be found and warned.

Jan of the Downs halted and pointed to a ridge they were approaching. "It's over there," he said. "I'll come no further—Pat's had scares enough."

"You'll wait?" Kinnaird asked.

"Aye. Then I'll be glad of the chance to rest and sleep."

Leaving him, they went up the rising ground and over the ridge. No second glance was necessary to discover the object that had frightened both Jan and his horse. Tall as a man, and several paces in circumference, it stood in a little hollow down the hillside.

Ashley's thoughts flashed to the huge dome and glowing sphere that shot deep into the earth and high into the heavens. The object in the hollow was undoubtedly created by the same beings—the Sentinels, as he now thought of them. Base and top were circular, light grey and separated by six slender pillars of the same appearance. Above the whole, not visibly connected to it, was a quivering disc of green light.

"You stay here—I'll look closer," Ashley said jerkily.

He plodded down through the snow. As Jan had said, there was something odd in the way the thing *looked*. No part of it seemed solid, top, bottom and separating pillars being shadowy, like the reflection of reality alone. The eyes strove to focus, and could not. Uneasy, he

walked round it. Superficially, there was nothing to cause terror—no sound, no vibration or movement. There seemed no reason why a man should not step in one side, cross the circular base, and emerge between the columns on the other. Even the shimmering disc above the contraption was only just so bright and noticeable as to attract attention, without being so vivid as to frighten the most timid bird or creature of the hills.

At one side his nostrils seemed to detect the odour of fragrant herbs. Even as he watched an abrupt, quick movement came between the pillars, and a flurry of brown as a rabbit shot from inside the contraption and raced for cover. Its unexpected appearance was as a reply to his curiosity and to the idea that had been growing as he walked round the hollow. If safe for a rabbit, should a man hesitate?

He stepped from the snow to the base of the contraption, and in through the pillars.

The world seemed to spin, collapsing and expanding about his ears. There was a sense of weightedness and rapid motion, as through universal greyness without beginning or end. Then all outer sensation ceased. Terror rang like a gong in his mind, but there awareness ended. No hearing, no seeing, no bodily sensation of either pain or comfort. Only his mind remained alive and conscious within itself, abruptly deprived of all connection with his physical senses.

Images not of his own creating began to appear in his mind, strange, formless, arising uncalled and slipping away of their own, like dreams. They beat upon his awareness, and always seemed to be *questioning*—inarticulate, incomprehensible, yet demanding, and *finding*. Round and round the figments wove, until his consciousness retreated from them and their probing enquiry. Time passed, but could not be judged. The interrogation seemed to have lasted aeons, the watching to have been directed against him mind for ever.

Then abruptly it ceased and he slowly became aware of his body—could hear his own breathing, and the thud of his heart, and feel his eyelids open. His gaze met darkness. But it was the simple darkness caused by lack of light, not the total deprivation of sight which had left not even blackness. He moved, and could feel the tension in his limbs and muscles—struggled to sit up, and heard the breath hiss between his teeth.

Some force held his legs together and his arms at his sides. He could not rise, nor see if he was bound from shoulders to feet, or secured by other means.

The hours crept on. Hunger came, grew almost unendurable, then ceased. Thirst began, slowly increasing. Cramps racked his limbs from their enforced motionlessness. Once he slept, and tried to decide, on

waking, how long his captivity had endured. The period of questioning was uncertain; also the number of hours lost in sleep. But the periods of waking awareness had been long. They totalled many hours—perhaps forty-eight; perhaps more. Certainly not less.

Hope itself was beginning to fade when abruptly the world seemed to collapse and expand, spinning about his ears. He felt as if moving without weight through an endless greyness, then light snapped on and he found himself standing between the wavery grey pillars and about to step from the platform to the ground. He completed the step automatically, and found himself ankle-deep in snow, with a fresh wind upon his face. Away up the slope Kinnaired waved, and he went that way, all else momentarily fading before the relief of freedom.

"Find anything?" Kinnaired asked.

Ashley stared at him. There was no unusual concern in the voice, no astonishment at his return after so long an absence.

"I thought you foolish to go so near," Kinnaired said, his eyes still upon the object in the hollow. "I almost shouted to warn you not to go inside. But when you walked straight in and out this side, I didn't call——"

"In and out——?" Ashley whispered.

"Yes. I couldn't see you inside, but you came out at once." Kinnaired turned his gaze from the contraption for the first time. He frowned, grew astonished. "You look done in!"

Ashley licked his lips. "*How long since I left you here?*"

The astonishment and concern on the other's open face grew. "How long? Perhaps twenty minutes—half an hour at the most. You went down, looked round the thing, whatever it is, walked through, then came back——"

Half an hour, Ashley thought. He was back on the hill with Kinnaired. Jan would be waiting over the hill, not restless yet because only half an hour had passed. Yet the nightmare had been real. The counted breaths, the hunger. . . . He had made no error.

"Has something happened?" Kinnaired asked.

Ashley's knees gave. Hunger, stress, release, combined. Fainting, he did not feel the other's arms go round him.

Heavy rain beat upon them as they emerged from the deep shelter, and the snow had already gone except in the deepest ridges of the hills. During the three days since returning with his friend and Jan the horse-man, Ashley had often pondered on the nightmare investigation he had endured. Martin Kinnaired had heard him out patiently, expressing no

disbelief though his eyes were puzzled.

"If it's as you say, then they have scientific devices we haven't dreamed of," he decided pensively. "You only appeared to be inside the contraption a few moments. If hours—or days—passed for you, then they have some means of changing the usual temporal continuity of events. With a less intelligent victim, the whole thing might be dismissed as a dream. Perhaps they—kept you longer than usual, undecided what to do."

He said no more and Ashley could not help him. There remained the feeling that his brain had been searched. Without the long period of inert captivity following, he might have come to disbelieve that the interrogation was a mere fantasy of his mind. But there had been conscious memory, too—and hunger. In the fact of those facts, there could be no denial, just as there could as yet be no explanation.

He bent his head against the rain. "Think we can breach the dam wall? "

"I hope so. This rain and thaw should help."

They wound over the hills, making what speed they could, Lucan Talbot and the others following, bearing tools and muffled against the rain. Ashley wished that the villagers had been found. Though they would by now be far away there remained at the back of his mind a lurking fear that they had camped in the valley. Yet for two days everyone to be spared had searched it, and others had watched for smoke from every hilltop. Almost the whole valley was densely wooded throughout its winding length and if the villagers were there they made no sign. Even now Lilowen and some of the women were still searching against the hour when the pent waters would leap between the hills.

Often he halted on high ground, scanning the panorama below. Beyond the curtain of rain tree-tops covered all the slopes. Many people could be concealed by them. Of the women there was no sign, but each knew she must reach the safety of the hills by dawn.

The party rested, ate, and went on. The lake above the barrier was high and brown, swollen by the rain and melted snow from the extensive vales beyond. Water already trickled over its top, streaming down among the grass and bushes that held the broken wall together.

Roped one to another, the men began to work on the centre of the dam, weakening it methodically. At each end of the structure others watched, ready to signal instantly if any general collapse began. Rain hissed and danced on the upheld waters and pelted upon heads and shoulders. During the night they camped in darkness on the rim of the valley above the lake. Once, very high, something zoomed in the swift

trajectory across the night sky, unseen above the rain and cloud. Ashley said nothing, but wondered if his companions heard it. It could mean that the Sentinels had other camps. If so, to what purpose was this attempt to flood the valley?

With dawn, two of the women appeared from the slopes below the dam, soaked, tired, and shaking their heads. Later, others came, each with the same story. No sign of the wandering cave tribe was to be found—no trail left by their passing, no spark of fire in the night, or sound. Ashley let his glance rove over the depths of the valley, lost in distant mists, and wondered whether the search, long as it had been, was conclusive. The area of the valley must have totalled many square miles. And his old companions were skilled at hunting and hiding. Afraid, they might move without trace, and lie concealed, trusting no one.

Lilowen did not return and he began to grow uneasy as the sky became fully light. The roped gang upon the barrier had now broken up into small parties and men were being lowered down the precipitous face of the dam, digging away the soil, grass and bushes at many points.

"They're going to put in explosives," Kinnaird said. "Some of it is home-made, but it should do the trick."

Ashley scarcely listened. Away down the valley, from which his eyes had seldom strayed, was a rise, and upon it a figure, minute with distance, had appeared, waving. His grasp went upon his friend's arm.

"Lilowen, daughter of Bate——"

Martin Kinnaird wrinkled up his eyes. "I haven't the keen distant sight you have, Ashley."

"Under the clump of trees." He pointed. Her gestures were complex, seeming to indicate that they come to her, yet that something away behind her in the valley was what she wished them to see.

"She should be up out of the valley by now!" Kinnaird said abruptly. "Once the explosive is touched off, the rest will be a matter of minutes only——"

Ashley turned for the side of the valley. "Wait! I am going down!"

Even as he ran Kinnaird's voice drifted after him. "Bring her up! We can't wait. We may be discovered. Every minute dangerous——"

His words were lost in the sound of the rain and the swish of the sodden branches as Ashley plunged down the side of the valley. As he ran he hoped that the sense of direction given by a lifetime in the open would not desert him.

The trees were tall, the ground sodden. The rain and melted snow had long since concealed any tracks which might have existed. It seemed a long time before the way began to rise slightly towards the spot where

Lilowen had been standing. There was no sign of her, no reply when he called.

From the rise he looked back. The dam was far away and above, the men like tiny puppets jerking and crawling on the faces of the barrier. Kinnaird was watching through binoculars, and gestured urgently with one hand.

Ashley called again, and there was a reply, distant but repeated more loudly. Lilowen came from amid the trees, her wet garments clinging to her, her hair devoid of covering. Agitation trembled on her face.

"Your people are in the valley——"

"Where?" Dismayed, he thought of the dam, and Kinnaird's words.

"A long way back. They had hidden in old caverns, afraid to make fire by night or go out by day." Her bright eyes were intently upon him and she seemed to be taking strength from his presence. "It was to be a refuge until they felt it safe to go on."

He held her arm. "The caverns are high on the valley side?"

"No!" Her golden, wet hair curled round her shoulders at the vigour of her denial. "They are low down—near the course of the water that finds its way over the dam."

The breath hissed between his lips. "You warned them?"

"I tried." Her tone was piteous. "They didn't seem to understand, or think it urgent——"

"But everyone was to be out of the valley by dawn!"

"I know." She nodded mutely.

"Then we must hurry!"

He turned to wave to Kinnaird, and halted, the very beat of his heart pausing. Above the dam hung a luminous object, poised on hazy beams of violet light. Large, resembling the three seen over the caves where he had lived, it was momentarily stationary, as if beings within it observed the men below, judging of their activity. Kinnaird still stood like a carved figure at the end of the dam, but his companions on it were swarming up their ropes, running along the barrier top, and scattering upon the sides of the valley. It was dangerous to wait, Kinnaird had said. . . .

Then flashes dotted themselves across the face of the dam and plumes of white smoke sprouted and rose. The wall cracked, began to fail. Brown water shot through. Even as the explosions reached his ears Ashley saw a huge section of the dam topple forward, impelled by a solid mass of water that leapt in a turmoil against the crumbling rampart. Beyond, seen with nightmare clarity, the nearest edge of the lake was visible, abruptly sloping down like a smooth brown hillside—the first fearful movement of the vast miles of water beyond.

Ashley grasped Lilowen's hand and ran. As he went he thought half consciously that Kinnaird had done the right thing. If it had been a choice of this moment or never—then the dam should go. With the Sentinels' craft already overhead, any delay could have caused failure.

A whispering began behind them, very distant, growing slowly into a murmur so ponderous that the earth shook beneath their fleeing feet. Mixed with the murmurings there grew the sound of snapping trees, and a rushing as of a great wind.

"Your people!" Lilowen gasped as she ran.

He doubted if anything could be done now. If they had remained in the caverns, it was the end.

Gasping, stumbling, he thought of the vast body of water above the dam. Miles in extent, it would inundate the valley below. Run as they would, they were too slow—could not hope to gain any point high enough to escape the flood. . . .

The rushing grew to a roar, gurgling and hammering as continuous thunder. Great trees snapped and cracked. Behind, mounting high above them, came the great wall of water, carrying on its crest a murderous flotsam of branches, bushes and rubbish. In the instant of turning Ashley's arms locked round Lilowen, and her arms came round him as her cry of terror was lost in the roaring water. An unendurable force smote him, compressing, agonising, lifting his feet as feathers from the earth. Brown fury lashed round him and though his muscles creaked his arms were dragged open and left empty, beating wildly amid the debris of the flood.

When overhanging bushes at last came into his grasp, Ashley did not know how long he had fought the buffeting waters. He dragged himself to solid ground, turned round and sat up, breathing heavily.

All the lower reaches of the valley were flooded so deeply that no treetop showed. Higher, where the water had risen with less violence, branches stood above the swirling brown, swaying and dipping with the pressure of the current. Masses of twigs and rubbish floated past on the surface, mixed with the uprooted trunks of smaller trees, spinning and twisting from his very feet to the distant hillsides across the valley.

He rose unsteadily and sought higher ground. Unexpectedly, the water was still slowly rising, creeping over the spot where he had rested. Reaching a hillock, he was compelled to pause again. Dumbly he wondered if a mere girl could have lived in the swell of released waters, and whether all his old companions had perished where they lay concealed.

After a long time he began to pick his way along the slopes a little above the water line, often pausing to scan the flood, and as often finding no sign of man or woman, dead or living. The current had carried him down the valley beyond sight of the remains of the dam. Nothing showed what its destroyers were doing, or if the object poised on hazy violet beams had gone away.

As he went on he felt increased astonishment at the height the water had maintained. Nor was its level subsiding, but rather seeming to rise slowly while at the same time its velocity decreased.

He began to wonder whether he would ever see Lilowen again, the slender, agile girl who had risked danger to warn the cave dwellers. Shivering, fatigued by the struggle, he made slow progress. At last it grew too dark to see across the water and he sat down, hungry and cold, to wait for dawn.

With the first glimmer of daylight he rose stiffly and went on. For the first time a new fact struck him—he was on the wrong side of the flooded valley. Only from the opposite range of hills could Kinnaird's camp be reached. In his present exhaustion he could never swim across to those remote slopes, he was sure. Only if the water went down, shortening the distance, could the attempt be made.

He judged it near noon when the hills flanking the crater came into view. Nowhere along the waters edge had he found sign that anyone but himself had survived the deluge. Numbed, tired, he struggled on. The slopes rose, flattened out, and he found himself looking down upon the crater from an unaccustomed angle. Simultaneously, the very core of his being seemed to creep with astonishment and terror and he froze, staring below.

The strange dome was intact, and no water was in the crater. A little higher up the valley an almost invisible green radiance played, and the flood stood piled there in a vertical wall, dammed in its path.

Dimly he realised that this was the meaning of the reduced current and high level. Unable to escape, the waters were backing slowly up the valley, finding a new level in an extending lake that halted like a precipice.

Limbs quivering, he withdrew under a tree and tried to discern what held the water back. Except for the faint green light, there was nothing. Many times taller than the tallest tree, the cliff of water hung there. Below, protected by forces unknown, the unearthly construction that Kinnaird and he had first seen was unharmed, untouched by the flood as was the whole valley beyond the invisible barrier.

After a long time he turned away and withdrew among the trees. To try so much, and lose so much—and gain so little. It was unnerving. Stumbling, he bit his lips and swore against the enemy that had come

unbidden to an Earth already eclipsed in night and disaster. Such beings as the Sentinels apparently had no use for men, or respect for the way in which mankind had fought its way up to civilisation. Instead, the very downfall of men seemed to offer a chance they could take so that they might make Earth their own, Ashley thought. With such means as the green radiance could they protect themselves, making useless man's greatest efforts. He wondered whether this new development would awaken the Sentinels to punitive efforts against humanity. The flood showed men were ready to fight—and those who struck the first blow must expect to be hit back. The thought was alarming. With it in his mind he lay down and slept.

As he slumbered he dreamt that men who move swiftly and silently in the night lifted him and bore him rapidly back along beside the water. The dream seemed to last a long time, blending with fantasies of his tired and sluggish mind. Sometimes he stirred, but his great inner fatigue was too great and full awareness did not come.

When he awoke it was light. Memories came back slowly. Stiff, he rubbed his limbs, sitting up and shaking the stupor from his head.

His surroundings were not those in which he had lain down to sleep. Across the valley, clear in the morning light, was the remote end of the crumbled dam, its centre now toppled from sight under the waters. Twenty paces from him down the slope was its near rim, terminating against the hillside. Where its top had been torn away a dark hole gaped in the rock, uncovered by the dislodged masonry and left high above the surface of the lake, whose level had dropped to flood the valley below. Up out of the hole, walking hand in hand in single file, came six men . . .

He sat up, the numbness of sleep gone. *Men—yet not men.* Naked white like things born in the dark, they moved with eyes closed, speaking briefly in voices having an odd, high pitched tone. They came towards him unerringly, and he jumped to his feet backing away. At the movement the six halted, faces directed towards him.

"You are awake," the leader said.

Ashley's fear began to subside, leaving only shock and astonishment. The six were thin, slight and stunted. Oddly childlike, they faced him and his unease turned to pity. Never had he seen such weaklings, so bony, narrow-chested and sorry. He licked his lips.

"I am awake."

They turned their faces away from his, up at the sky, round at the trees. Horrified, he saw that their eyes never opened; nor did their lids flicker.

"It is—strange," one said.

The voice lacked all bass resonance and had a curious sibilance as of someone accustomed to whisper. Only with difficulty could Ashley follow the words. His gaze flashed to the hole.

"You have—been down there—"

Their leader faced him. "We—we do not know what has happened. Often we came to the inner stream to fish, as our fathers taught us. But there was a great noise, and shaking, and the waters went down—"

He moaned. Ashley felt compassion near to tears. "You— cannot see," he whispered.

One of them faced him. "What is see?"

The leader's pale features trembled. "There was a legend of seeing, which my grandfather told me. A legend about coming down out of light, to hide . . ."

"Go on," Ashley breathed.

"I do not remember much. It was that his father had told him that once was light and seeing, and that we must always try to find light and seeing again. I thought it but one of the tales the old folk tell when fishing has been good and they have eaten well. The tales were so many. Of strange food all ready for eating in boxes. Of light in our world too, until the thing that made it ceased. Of trying to find light— of forgetting what light was—"

Spasms ran across his face. Still holding his companion's hand, he turned his face up to the sky.

"I had never believed. But here is a strangeness—and openness, and something here, too"—he put his hand to his eyes. "A pain, and feeling in my head—"

One of the others pulled his hand. "Let us go back. It is not well out here. The air moves about us, and there are many sounds."

Ashley stepped forward slowly, his thought still chaotic. "You carried me here?"

"Yes," the leader said. "We followed the water, searching for fish as our fathers had taught us. We found you. Then we were afraid, and a feeling began to come in our heads—" Again his hand went to his closed eyes. "It is not well."

Suddenly they turned. Hand in hand, in single file, they disappeared back into the cavern. Trembling, Ashley watched them go. Three hundred years . . . Generation after generation living in the dark, fishing those sections of the vast shelter which the lake had flooded. Forgetting the world above . . . *Ten generations in the dark*, he thought Babies would never open their eyes—men and women would live and die, whispering and groping their way about the corridors of the deep shelter . . .

Something caught in his throat. Unashamed, he felt tears stream down his face. The night of humanity indeed. Thus had man done unto man. . .

Under the dawn sky the waters were still now, extending in unruffled grey to the remote line of hills. Judging the distance for the twentieth time, Ashley knew he could not swim it. Exposure, hunger, fatigue all had reduced his strength.

He rose stiffly and went on, again continuing his search along the miles of the lake rim. Below the crater extended the radio-active stream no creature dared approach or ford. Higher up the valley, above the ruined dam, lay the vast reservoir filling the basin of the valley for many miles. Must he therefore take to the water, hoping his strength would last . . . ?

Ahead, beyond a precipitous drop, voices sounded among the trees. His attention quickened. They were surely voices he knew, not the weak twitter of the dark dwellers.

He reached the top of the headlong slope. Twenty feet below, at the foot of the sheer drop, men were coming from under the trees. He recognised Doc Melvil, with his grey hair all awry, and some of the council of seven. Bernard Rimaster came after them, walking with something of his usual arrogance. They halted, realising that the earth slope could not be scaled.

Ashley stood on its edge and waved. "Follow along from the water—it is not far—"

Their faces turned up towards him and they halted. Their expressions of surprise became something that changed Ashley's inner joy into cold unease.

"It is the son of the trader," one said.

The tone made anxiety substitute Ashley's unease. It had held no gladness, no welcome.

Rimaster stared up at him and shook his fist. His wide face was dark with passion.

"You led those they call Sentinels to our caves! When we found new shelter you caused the valley to be flooded!"

Ashley's tongue momentarily clung to his lips. No face below was friendly. Even Melvil's was doubtful. A lawmaker brandished his staff.

"Some of our women were drowned! We too, would be dead if the girl Lilowen had not warned us so that we set watch—"

Others were coming from the trees and suddenly a cry began, "Kill him! Kill the son of the trader!"

Ashley's tongue unfroze. "The Sentinels found the hill caves themselves—"

No one was listening. They shook their fists, their voices drowning his words. One was pulling out a sling . . . Ashley recognised him as a man who could bring down a running deer at thirty paces, and withdrew quickly from the rift. No man living could scale the slippery red earth. But away from the waterside its height decreased rapidly. Scarcely a hundred paces away the slope was such that they could all surmount it. Already the voices of the most fleet were fading that way.

Ashley turned and ran, stumbling sometimes, bitter disappointment replacing all other emotion. It would be a long way to the edge of the ruined dam. Even there he would find no safety, and the lake lay among hills he had never traversed.

Shouts told that his pursuers had scaled the barrier behind and away to his right and he tried to increase his pace. Tough and fleet, normally he would have been confident. But weariness had slowed his muscles, while anger lent speed to those following.

He emerged upon open ground and saw far ahead the curving headland where the dam had been. Fifty paces from where he was, stood trees. He reached them just as the first of his pursuers gained the open grassy slope. The space between hunted and hunters had decreased. A cry came after him.

"There he goes! Kill him!"

He ran swiftly, panting, seeking always the easiest way among the trees. As he ran he knew that he could not escape by speed alone. Bushes and undergrowth now hid the others, but the sound of their progress was near.

The trees thinned and he saw that he was upon the edge of the lake where the dam had been. Beyond, the going was more difficult. The voices behind were louder. He flung a glance around, and at the leaden waters. Here it was that the six blind cave-dwellers had stood, hand in hand, withdrawing afterwards to the only world they understood. His eyes sought the cavern entrance, failed, then discovered it. Hidden among the shelving rubble left by the collapse, it might go unseen by men who did not suspect its existence.

He scrambled for the opening and slid through it even as the voices came loud and clear behind among the trees. Inside, he froze, afraid that any movement might dislodge the loose stones.

The opening into the daylight was scarcely larger than a man. At his back was rock, cold and slippery as if from long immersion. Footsteps came on the earth above, and pebbles clattered across the opening. Then the steps went and the voices receded.

He studied the cavern, his eyes growing accustomed to the dimness. The shaft in which he stood might have been fashioned by the same designer as the entrances to the hill caves in which he had lived, he thought. Ankle-deep mud, still wet, showed the reservoir waters had filled it for an age.

Voices sounded again above, approaching. They were returning to search, he thought. Catching no sight of him beyond, they suspected he hid. With a last look at the rectangle of daylight, he turned and began to make his way deeper into the hillside.

The light faded very slowly, glimmering on the dark walls. Indistinct impressions in the mud showed the six had indeed come this way. Once he halted, thinking he heard a man's voice at the tunnel entrance. It was not repeated.

His feet sucked in the mud and in many places water dripped monotonously from higher levels. So dim became the light that he halted, one hand on the slimy wall. He sensed that a larger chamber opened out ahead. Judging from the caves in which he had lived, other tunnels would lead from it, terminating in a ring of inter-connecting rooms. Each had been built to shelter many people, Martin Kinnaird had said. Ashley had marvelled. Yet had admitted too, that all the caverns were uniform, as if made by men.

Bends in the tunnel behind prevented any glimpse of the outside world, but walls, roof and floor showed with dim, reflected radiance. The logical thing was to wait, he thought. When night came it should be safe to leave.

He rested his back against the wall, listening to the drip of moisture from above. The air was damp and still. Each falling spot of water caused its own echoes. During generations a people always living in such corridors would learn not to shout. He shivered. The whispery, chirping voices of the dark dwellers repelled him. Sub-human. Pitiable.

At length he squatted on the muddy floor, arms laced round his legs and his chin on his knees. Hunger was returning, and the chill of his surroundings increased at his stillness. Cramped and sad, he slipped into a half-consciousness near the sleep of utter fatigue.

Awareness returned slowly, and with it the knowledge that a voice had been calling for a long time, then had ceased. A frightened voice—a woman's, that like a half-remembered dream reminded him of Lilowen.

He rose, muscles hurting. The dim reflected light had faded. Night was near.

He risked a shout. No answer came, only echoes vibrating like many receding voices down the passages. After they had ceased another

sound came. Reply or call he knew not. Nor the direction. Weak, distant, echoing, reminding him more strongly of the girl torn from his arms by the flood.

He set his back to the fading daylight and began to feel his way on into the deeper ways of the labyrinth. Soon all light was gone. His eyes encountered only blackness, but the way rose so that mud no longer dragged his feet.

How long he walked it was impossible to tell. At first he strove to maintain a clear idea of direction. Later, he knew the task impossible. Walking with one hand against the wall, the other outstretched, he sensed that he had passed many chambers and openings. Often he halted to call and listen. For along time no reply came, then Lilowen's voice sounded again, unmistakable.

Her calls grew louder, carrying a new note of hope. The echoes became less confusing. At last he knew her to be near . . . her voice came out of the dark ahead, trembling with gladness. Then he had touched her, was holding her in his arms. Her fingers passed over his face. She began to cry, shaking. He stroked her hair, damp yet silken.

"Do not cry, daughter of Bate——"

She was still. "It is from gladness."

"I thought you drowned."

"I found a floating tree——" He felt her shudder at the memory. "Men who walk with closed eyes brought me here."

"They meant well—they have no other home."

She stood at his side, holding his fingers. "We must not stay here. Listen."

He did. Somewhere far away was a low moaning, rising and falling, growing and fading, yet always a little louder than before. As of a hundred wailing voices, the sound put cold fingers to Ashley's spine.

"The dark dwellers——" he breathed.

"Yes. One told me they are dying. The old water-passages which they have fished are dry. They scatter bait there, as their fathers and grandfathers taught them, but there is nothing. They have no food——"

He did not answer. The level of the reservoir had fallen. Now that the dam was gone it could never rise to fill the lower tunnels of the labyrinth.

"Their fear may turn to anger against us," Lilowen murmured.

He knew her words true. He remembered the pale, lined faces of the six. Their naked bodies, closed eyes, wasted limbs and chirping voices. Here, the spark of humanity had burned low. They could not understand the world above, or comprehend why the age-old waters had

drained from their fishing grounds. There was only anger and a deep fear, heard now in the wailing lament that grew and grew. He pictured them moving swiftly through the passages they knew so well, hand in hand, sightless yet never knowing what vision was. The inner thrill of danger and warning could not be suppressed.

He turned abruptly and began to retrace the way he had come. Behind followed Lilowen's steps and breathing, very close, but she did not speak. Nor did he voice his uppermost thought—he did not know the way out.

The next hour was of nightmare terror. All sense of direction itself seemed to go. Always his eyes sought for some hint of light, and found none. The ceaseless moaning came very near, and then grew more distant. He shivered, wondering what strange mental agony drove the dark dwellers tirelessly through the passages of their world. A search for waters to fish . . . ? An aimless flight attuned to their hand in hand progress in the dark . . . " Or were they combing all the tunnels systematically, expecting thus to catch any stranger ?

He hurried, pitying them with all his being. Their darkness was of the spirit, also. Their enduring midnight was without hope—could end only in the kindness of death.

"We are lost," Lilowen said at last.

He did not deny it. The passages seemed without end. Yet the way to freedom was near, if chance would but direct their steps that way . . .

He had given up hope when his feet began to drag in mud. So slight that it could have been fantasy, a clearer air smelling of growing things seemed to breathe against his face. He took Lilowen's hand, steadying her while she stumbled, and drove his aching muscles on. The air was more pure . . . quite suddenly a distant, immeasurable dim oblong of light showed, easing the complete blackness that had so long oppressed his eyes. He tugged his companion's arm. She started, and he knew she had been walking with closed eyes. Thus easily did habits begin . . . Tears glistened on her cheeks when they emerged by the side of the half drained lake. Stars shone, blessed and clear. A half moon was low above the trees on the hilltop.

"Let us—rest until dawn," she whispered.

They found a spot higher up the hills. Ashley broke a stick and sat with it under one hand. Away below the shadows around the rocks were deep and still. Beyond, the water lay like glass. He did not sleep.

Ashley stood with the weak morning sun at his back and watched the antics of the Sentinels on the edge of the crater. For a long time the

realisation of one fact had been growing in his mind—men, in their conflict against each other, had reduced mankind to insignificance. Humanity, through its own folly, could not combat these newcomers. Therefore men must seek truce or understanding with them.

Individual Sentinels were hard to distinguish. Sometimes there was a glimpse as of reflections on water momentarily still. Then it was gone. Their movements seemed as a coming and going through the stuff of moments of *now* which Ashley could count out in heart-beats. Seen, the Sentinels were dimly recognisable as adult forms of the transparent, vibrant eggs found in the nest dome. The eyes hurt to watch them. Sight of them was as if through fitfully changing prisms, while the crater edge stood solid and finite beneath.

They came across the trees and he felt their minds searching for him. Violin strings twanged in his mind. A humming as of the seeking passage of swift wasps sounded again and again in his head. His nerves drew taut. With all his will he resisted against the desire to run, striving for tranquility and contact.

He closed his eyes against the movements that earthly vision could not comprehend. With half his mind he wondered if he had risked too much. Old Samul had died. Gill and Rudge had vanished. He could only trust their deaths had arisen in error—had arisen because the newcomers to Earth had not then known the fragility of flesh and blood.

Suddenly a stillness came around him. Sun and wind were gone. No earth beneath his feet, no hillside . . . A tingling began over body and limbs, but instantly ceased. Then the stillness went also, replaced by a feeling of rapid movement.

He opened his eyes. The flooded valley and hills were half a mile below. His feet were upon a smooth, transparent floor below which shone violent beams, vanishing downwards. Instinctively he knew that he was in one of the vessels such as had hovered over the hill caves. It was gaining height, so that the scene fell away below. The whisper of air about its hull told of its velocity, increasing too.

The valley slid behind. New hills appeared, and were lost. Time after time the barren pits were seen, some great, some small. In three hundred years nature had crept back to hide in shame the wounds of man's making. In places the craters were thick, so that their rims overlapped in confusion. Once, away to his right, he glimpsed an area many miles in extent, churned up into ridge upon ridge still uncovered by trees or bush. Near was a vast expanse of dead earth, as if some dreadful chemical had fallen there.

Seas glinted below, then came wide lands equally pitted, sometimes hidden by mile upon mile of forest. At last Ashley closed his eyes,

emotion overpowered him.

"All your planet is thus," a voice said in his mind.

He opened his eyes, searching the narrow compartment. Nothing met his gaze, but to his left the scene was hazy and flickering, as if some refractive object stood between himself and the glass-like wall.

"It was done by your kind," the voice said.

The sun began to slip backwards in the sky. Night came. Then day and night again, repeated with quickening speed. Soon there was only a continuous semi-light, and a broad band like sunshine across the sky, wavering from solstice to solstice. In the semi-light the trees below shrank. Bushes and verdure melted away. The craters grew sharper in outline. The naked areas around them increased. Abruptly craters and bare earth were gone. Noble cities pointed at the sky. Roads stretched ribbon-like through cultivated lands. Simultaneously the sun halted in the heavens and began to drift once again from east to west. Night came. With it hordes of craft filled the skies.

Rockets streaked upon their brief trajectory, dying in pools of vivid fire. Buildings tumbled. Fitful light showed vehicles and people streaming from the cities. Still the craft came. Beneath them grew and grew a cataclysm of destruction and fire. Vast clouds of glowing powders rained from projectiles too high to see. The vehicles and people upon the roads grew still. At last Ashley could endure it no longer and pressed his palms to his eyes. When he removed them the wavering band was again in the sky. It slowed its motion. The grey-ness became flickering night and day. The days lengthened, and the sun halted in a wintry sky. Below were the forests he knew. A great trembling came upon his limbs.

From the heart of the ship the Sentinels watched the human they had taken, puzzled yet marvelling. At first they had supposed no intelligent life existed in the planet they had reached. Their traps had caught only simple creatures whose minds were empty of all but lowly, inarticulate knowledge. Then a larger creature had come. In his mind was strange knowledge. Regretfully the Sentinels realised they had already destroyed others of his kind. It had been an unavoidable error. Mankind had not been recognised as an intelligent life-form.

They strove to quieten the single human's fear, and reviewed the knowledge gained when once before he had lain their captive. In his mind was hope, fear, determination, and doubt. They saw that he could be noble; was brave and wished good for others. They saw that he had come to them, this second time, hoping for understanding instead of conflict.

They scanned back over the time-stuff of the past, again watching his approach over the hills. Afraid, he had not faltered. Deep in the vibration of molecules forming their being, they felt a new respect for him.

Now, with all their power, they tried to convey to him a suggestion and a plea. They had mined the surface of his planet without finding what they sought. They had spread, searched, tried again and again—and failed. Doubly difficult was the information they strove to convey because no thought-pattern for it existed in the human's mind. Their own term for the material they sought was incomprehensible to him. His mind was empty of oral or visual thought-patterns of it, giving no basis upon which they could build symbols he would understand.

Using techniques they had evoked in remote galaxies, they took him into the past. There, such shock and terror had seized his mind that their mental contact was momentarily broken. Back over the flooded valley, they prepared to set him down. Their wordless call went again to him—*We are far from home. Help us, earthman.*

Ashley stood on the sparse grass and watched the vessel float aloft on its hazy beams. The voices in his mind seemed to remain, whispering. *Help us, help us . . .*

He set his back to the crater and began to plod along the hills. Without knowing the means employed, he understood that the Sentinels could weave backwards along the very warp of time. But to do so expended energy. When the energy was gone they snapped back like the middle of a taut string. But it was not that they had wished to tell him. Instead there was a complex picture of man's destruction, its cause, mining, and great ships that still had incalculable light-years of space to traverse.

The hills by the crater sank from view behind. He hoped Lilowen had followed his advice, hiding opposite the broken dam. For the moment he felt he could think no more upon the new information and questions in his mind. He wanted rest, and the aid of Kinnaird and his companions.

Complete exhaustion was very near when Lilowen came from the trees, obviously searching him. She held his hands.

"Your friends are making a bridge across the waters. Soon it will be finished."

He nodded, moving as if in a dream. Sleep must come first—rest . . . food . . . It was comforting to know that both sides of the valley were again connected, he thought heavily.

Martin Kinnaird stood on the lake shore with his back to the gently bobbing bridge and drew his brows low over his clear blue eyes. His strongly lined face was pensive, his hands in pockets at his hips.

"You got the idea it was something to do with our past?"

Ashley nodded. "With the destruction of three hundred years ago. They didn't take me back in mere idleness."

"It was *real*?"

"Definitely." Ashley considered slowly. Less tired, no longer, hungry, he nevertheless experienced difficulty in putting his thoughts into words. "The same must have happened, briefly, when I entered the contraption in the hollow. They examined me, then returned me to the moment of entering, to make it seem to anyone outside that no examination had taken place——"

"I did find it difficult to believe you." Kinnaird admitted.

"They are tied to the present, though more loosely than we. They took me back to see the great explosions, I think. I felt they wanted to know where on this planet they could find the substances causing those explosions——"

He halted. It was impossible to put into words. Yet to his astonishment a gleam of understanding had appeared in Kinnaird's eyes. Excitement gleamed on his face.

"*They want fissionable minerals, Ashley!* They told you of mining without success?"

"I felt so—in many places, with equipment like that we saw."

"Then it fits!" Kinnaird declared. "They want fissionable materials, or ores. They've failed to find any, and I'm not surprised. Our ancestors used most of them. That was why the great blow-up was so tremendous. For a hundred years every nation armed like mad."

Ashley understood. "The planet is so big they could never find the old mines."

They camped some distance away in the hills, but Ashley could find little rest. Memories of the dark dwellers would return again and again. How pitiable and hopeless their lives, he thought. Better that they had never lived.

Kinnaird's words hung in his mind. Man, in his dreadful midnight of self-destruction, had almost exhausted all supplies of what the Sentinels sought. Yet they believed mankind could still help them. It was puzzling. They had taken him into the past, shown him the populous Earth, and seemed to pose a question in his brain . . .

He walked the camp, morose and restless. When darkness came he could not sleep. Instead, endlessly, his mind dwelt upon the past. Out of the chaos and welter of conflicting thoughts a dim idea began to dawn.

Too formless to be called a plan, too vague to be clothed in words, the idea gained strength while he sat, chin on knees, waiting for the first light of the east. At last he rose, his lips compressed and brows drawn down. *He could try.*

Morning came, bleak, misty and chill. He sought out Kinnaird amid the rough shelters they had erected. The lake was hidden beyond shadowy trees from which moisture dripped.

"Once you showed me some of the things that have been saved," he said.

Kinnaird rose from filling his pack. "Behind the locked steel door?"

"Yes. Records. References. Books, as you call them."

The other drew tight a strap. "There was quite a lot of stuff. We've been through it all pretty thoroughly. The place was probably a deep shelter strongroom of some kind——"

"I know," Ashley said, "That's why I'm wondering if there was anything which would help."

Kinnaird ceased his preparations and turned keen eyes on him, "Help what?"

"Show where the best mining areas were."

Understanding began to come into the keen eyes. "For fissionable ore material——?"

"Of course."

Doubt replaced the understanding. "But the mines were probably worked out."

Ashley shook his head. "On the contrary. They were at their best—a hundred years before the blow-up."

Kinnaird's comprehension suddenly illuminated his whole face. "The Sentinels could go back to that age and take what they wanted!"

"Yes," Ashley agreed, "If they knew where to look. I believe that's what they tried to tell me. It's clear they haven't been successful in finding radioactive in sufficient quantity. If any sources remain, the general activity from the craters probably upsets any detector equipment they have. If they searched before the blow-up there would be difficulties—they haven't sufficient energy available to keep them in the past for long periods. But if we could tell them exactly where to look——"

He ended expressively and Kinnaird pursed his lips in concentration. "There may have been something in the strongroom."

"I want you to go back with me and search." For the second time in his life Ashley wished with all his might that he could read. The first time had been when Kinnaird took down one of the things of many

leaves which he called books. "It's a very long way——"

"But worth trying were it twenty times as far!" Kinnaird put in. "We'll go alone—travel fast and light."

The miles seemed doubly long and a sharp wind had arisen, following them over the hills. At noon the sky was grey and low, and darkness came soon, forcing them to halt. Sleet came on the wind the whole night, and Ashley rose, shivering, at the first dim light of dawn.

Later, he noticed that Kinnaird limped. The other smiled, the smile half a grimace and obviously hiding pain.

"Had an accident years ago—slipped when we were working on the dam and twisted the same leg——"

Their pace was reduced and a white line of suffering was round his compressed lips when at last they reached the entrance and descended out of the biting wind. They rested, ate, and Kinnaird began to search. Ashley watched him, unable to help. The characters on the book spines meant nothing; each page within might have been the same. He marvelled that his companion did not need to give even the most cursory glance to many volumes.

At last Kinnaird opened a slender book upon the table, and unfolded

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out of it a large sheet marked in many colours. His finger traced a line of characters.

"Mineral sources in Europe, latter part of 20th Century," he read. He referred to an index and began pointing at red dots, "Here are the Carpathians—you can't mistake them, that's the Danube and Black Sea." He indicated the outline. "Most other sources are scattered——"

"The Sentinels could go straight there." Ashley studied the map keenly. A thousand miles or more made no difference, he thought, remembering his experience in the vessel. "It's turned out better than I dared hope."

Kinnaird's face had become grey. "You want to go back to them soon?"

"At once."

There was silence and Ashley read the truth in his friend's eyes. There was a limit to endurance—and Kinnaird had reached it.

He took the book gently. "I'll go alone. I don't need to read this now you've shown me."

When he left the shelter entrance the wind was strong in his face, swirling with sleet that cut like tiny knives. He drew his collar high, grasped his staff, and set himself against the gale.

The hills seemed unending. Darkness came quickly, and he walked until he feared direction might be lost, then camped on a slope where thin bushes gave little protection. The long hours of night crept by. Shivering and stiff, he rose at the first light and plodded on, eyes searching for a familiar configuration in the hills.

The way was long and his fatigue was mounting. He ate from his pack, rested, marched again, and decided that he could not reach the lake by nightfall. Sheltering trees tempted him, and he slept beneath them. With dawn, he again set his face towards the lake. Individuals, himself included, had ceased to matter.

As he walked he wondered if he would find the Sentinels again and make them understand. Understand they must—for their own sake and the sake of all mankind.

The camp had been broken, everyone was gone. He wondered if they had followed Kinnaird, taking some other path so that he had not met them.

The fragile bridge bobbed when he set foot on it, ripples spreading across the lake. Its far end was lost in a belt of low mist, grey and chill. He assured himself that the book was still in his pocket, and walked carefully on the bundles of reeds and brush. A grave and urgent responsibility had become his—a duty greater than personal danger.

A figure began to show in the mist ahead, approachinag. As the

distance decreased he loomed bigger. Strong, with height to match; dark, with a wide face. He strode rapidly, gaze bent on the floating causeway.

Ashley halted. The other realised his presence and stopped too. Across ten paces their eyes met.

"So you had hidden, son of a trader!"

Ashley bitterly regretted his own folly. Arising at dawn he had left his staff where it lay—but the other was not thus unarmed. A short, hard laugh, killed off echoes by the mist, showed the fact was realised.

"Let me pass!" Ashley commanded.

Rimaster laughed again. With heavy steps that set the bridge bobbing he approached. The triumph in his eyes was clear.

"Let me pass!—" Ashley grated. "Afterwards we will fight how, when and where you choose!"

Rimaster chuckled. "*This* is as I choose."

The tone showed talk was useless. Impossible to convince Rimaster that even the most bitter personal conflict could become unimportant.

"Very well," Ashley said. "Throw away your stick."

As answer Rimaster lunged and the staff took him in the stomach. Under their combined weight, the mats and bundles tilted, sinking. Slow from fatigue, Ashley found himself sprawled in the water. Above him

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LEICS.

Rimaster raised the staff murderously. It descended, swishing. Ashley jerked, saving his head. The staff rose again. Feet apart, Rimaster hesitated, planning his blow. Ashley knew that this time he would not miss.

Then a man came running along the bridge, bobbing it wildly. His arms lapped round Rimaster and both went into the water with a splash. Gasping, Ashley scrambled to the jerking reeds. A grey head appeared. He grasped a shoulder and found himself face to face with Doc Melvil.

"Couldn't let him strike you down like that, Traderson——"

He helped Melvil to the bridge. Rimaster was floundering at its edge. Ashley caught his arms, jerked him half out of the water, and smote him on the jaw. The concussion to his knuckles gave him sharp pleasure. With a second jerk he landed Rimaster flat on his back on the half submerged bridge.

"Watch him until he comes round, Doc," he said.

He stepped back and the brushwood rose. From beyond the inert form Melvil waved.

"I'd like to have done the same."

Ashley grinned crookedly, turned, and set on across the bridge. He felt in no mood for scraps. They wasted time.

The distant bank emerged slowly from the mist. To his relief the slopes beyond were empty of figures. Apparently Rimaster had come to the bridge alone.

Mist hung thick and white among the trees and on the slopes and Ashley walked in enveloping silence. He felt confident that the Sentinels had watched him and would know of his coming.

He had only traversed the first hills when the sound as of rapidly passing wasps began. Disjointed forms came and went, oscillating from dimension to dimension. He halted letting them encircle him. Many quickly plucked violin strings were in his ears again, pinging in rapid vibration. Then with searing directness contact was gained. Wordless thought symbols flashed into his brain.

"You have returned to help us?"

"Yes," he thought. "I understand what you need and can show you where to mine. I have a map—a drawing of the land, sea and rivers."

Turmoil incomprehensible to his mind arose, then the awareness contacting him came through again.

"We can go now."

He was whisked through greyness. The greyness faded, leaving a vessel in which he rode silently and swiftly above the hills. The lake slid away behind, and he opened the book and unfolded the map. A

vision not as of earthly eyes seemed to be watching, and he traced the course, showing the dots where the mineral deposits lay. The movement of the terrain below gained speed. A narrow strip of sea passed, then the hills, plains and rivers of a large land-mass. Everywhere was the same desolation as he had first seen.

At length motion ceased and ahead loomed high mountains, peaks high in a cloud-flecked sky.

"This is the area," a voice said in his mind.

Minutes passed, then the voice came again. "We have not yet travelled back in time. Great energy is used to maintain the ship in the past. We are not robbers, nor do we wish to take too plentifully of minerals not our own. When we return to the past ages and mine there, what we take will be lost to you and your fellows for ever, as if it had never been. From that age the future of your world will be changed. It will be a new future—different because of what we have taken——"

"Take all fissionable ores!" Ashley thought, interrupting. "Take all! I ask it as reward for what I have done."

He wondered if they would agree. This was what he had planned and mentioned to no one . . .

There was a long delay. "We will," the voice said at last. More

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delay, then: "We are prepared to return to the past and mine. You wish to remain in this present with your companions?"

"I do."

"Then we will return you to them."

A humming began and faded. Darkness came and passed. He opened his eyes and found himself standing on the rain-soaked slope above the valley. Just visible below was a camp and he recognised Lilowen, even that moment searching the hills with her gaze for him.

Like a solitary bee a voice shot through his brain. "Go to them. An alternative future must arise from the moment we change your past, giving new trends of development to your planet from that moment. We will protect you with a time cyst——"

He ran for the camp. Martin Kinnaird was limping towards it, helped by a friend. Doc Melvil was awaiting him, with Lucan Talbot and others Ashley recognised. As he gained them a man on a black horse came trotting over the adjacent slope and into the camp.

At the same moment a vibrant dome came out of the misty sky, descending to cut off sight and sound of the hills. Cutting them off from the stream of time itself, Ashley guessed. The stallion reared and Jan slid to the earth, holding the rein. Inside the dome an even half-light illuminated their faces.

An alternative future from this point, with no vast mineral resources in the Carpathians, Ashley thought. It had taken two equally-armed great nations to initiate the global war which had thrown mankind back into a darker age than any from which he had struggled! *If one side had never armed . . .?*

He did not know what period elapsed inside the time cyst, or what centuries were re-traced and re-enacted outside.

Helpless they stood in the dimness. Outside would be a new world—that which arose where there was no atomic minerals in the Carpathians. *Take it all*, he had said. From a remark Kinnaird had made, he thought a great nation bordering the Carpathians had been partly instrumental in starting the global war. Now, that nation would, instead, lack atomic materials—might, indeed talk peace instead of rattling the sabre with the others. . .

Suddenly, with a faint twanging which rose above audibility, the dome was lost in evanescent, confused whirlings of power and sky and earth returned to view. Ashley turned his gaze down into the valley.

The sun was higher in a clear winter sky and where the rough floating bridge had been stood a high dam, white as marble. Electric cables stretched from the dam down into the valley, where no trees stood. Instead was a neat city, shining between the slopes. Roads wound like

creamy tape up the hills; vehicles sped along them, and through the streets of the city.

There had been no global war, Ashley thought.

On a hilltop twenty paces from where they stood, a tall obelisk surmounted by a disc pointed at the sky. Wondering, he walked slowly towards it. Its base bore a plate, covered with many words.

Kinnaird came up behind him, and began to read.

In memory of those beings from space who came in 1975, whose impenetrable Dome stands for ever on this hillside, who worked good among us for many years and came from regions unknown . . .

Ashley looked down the hillside. The dome—the time cyst—was gone. Already its absence after generations had been noted, and people were coming up the hill road. For a moment he bowed his head in thanks to the Sentinels, and in wonder at their sciences, then taking Lilowen's hand he stepped forward to meet the newcomers.

Within their vast, dwindling ships the Sentinels let their perceptions drift back to scan the planet they had left, their minds searching up and down the centuries. Great and beautiful cities stood on every shore and river, or dotted peaceful plains and cultivated valleys. It was well, they thought.

Near one spot, where they had first landed, they noted that the time cyst had just dissolved. From inside, humans stepped out, looking round in astonishment because mere moments had flown. Outside, other humans gazed in amazement at the vacant hillside, where for hundreds of years a great, glimmering dome had rested.

Momentarily the Sentinels let contact reach a man who was walking down towards the crowds. In the momentary contact they expressed thanks, wordless yet sincere.

Then they turned their attention again to the years ahead, and to the control of the great atomically powered time and space engines. Ahead were vast realms of space where rest might yet be found. Earth was not theirs and they would not stay.

The planet shrank, dwindled, and was gone. Its sun became a receding pin point. Uncountable other pin points shrank round it. The galaxy became a hazy disc, a spot—a weak, dim, infinitely remote and tiny speck among all the vastness of worlds. Silently the Sentinels turned their attention ahead, flowing through the centuries.



An opinion of some new science-fiction books

From KENNETH F. SLATER

You'll probably have noticed that the reprint s-f magazines have become considerably fewer, and whilst the "original" magazines—those which are published in the U.K. in the first instance, and are certainly not the poorer offspring of an American magazine—have not increased in number, they are certainly holding their own. This seems to be a good sign; it shows that we are not entirely dependent on importation for our s-f. When the book publishers follow this lead it is definitely encouraging—and there is a strong indication that this is what is happening.

Michael Joseph have entered the field with a series of "Novels of Tomorrow," edited by Miss Clemence Dane. The first two of these are John Christopher's *THE YEAR OF THE COMET* (271 pp., 12/6), and Harold Mead's *THE BRIGHT PHOENIX* (303 pp., 12/6). Both original book-length novels. *THE YEAR OF THE COMET* continues the theme of Mr. Christopher's "future history," that of the managerial civilisation. Here, however, we have that civilisation on the downward path, heading towards decadence. The hero is Official Charles Grayner, a scientist who is pushed around by the manipulations of the big managerial groups—until he loses the girl he loves, and starts doing some push-

ing on his own account. Recommended. I'm afraid that *THE BRIGHT PHOENIX* did not interest me as much. We have the somewhat stereotyped future world of Ministries of Eugenics, citizens who are part of the ant-hill life—and who in the main require and can realise nothing better. There is the one man—the world's only explorer—who does not fit, the girl with whom he makes acquaintance, and the possibility of the President deciding to set up a colony in another part of the atom-war-devastated world. The book is largely concerned with the Colony, and the emergence of the Bright Phoenix of man's individuality. To this Mr. Mead lends a skill which holds the reader's interest, and it is a pity that the ground on which he spreads his fertile imagination should be such an overworked area.

From E. C. Tubb we have some more "future history," complete with a time scale covering a mere 35 years. A short period, yes, but a busy, exciting and adventurous period in man's history, when he is conquering Mars. At least, when a section of mankind is conquering Mars; sometimes because they have no option, sometimes out of idealism, sometimes out of pity for those already there. This novel—or rather, connected set of stories—is based on tales which

have seen magazine publication, but have been almost completely rewritten to form a connected whole. **ALIEN DUST** (Boardman, 224 pp., 9/6) is Mr. Tubb's best work to date, and a very fine book. And, for a science fiction novel, it has an emotional content which too often is lacking in even the best books of this kind. I commend to you the martyrship of such people as Sam Weston and "Pop," the devotion to duty of "Doc" Winter, the egotistical and idealist drive of Jim Hargraves. You may have already read some of this book—but just the same, don't miss reading the revised version.

If you like plenty of intergalactic scope in your yarns you will enjoy Raymond F. Jones' **THIS ISLAND EARTH** (Boardman, 9/6, 220 pp.), which opens with research and development electronician Cal Meacham receiving some strange condensers to fill an order—obviously incapable of carrying a load even a fraction of what they are required to do—until they are tested! These are followed by a catalogue; a catalogue listing parts Cal has never dreamed existed. Working from the catalogue and parts obtained by ordering through the same mysterious channel, Cal builds an "interocitor"—and promptly finds himself in contact with the Peace Engineers. Taking employment with them, he discovers they are extra-terrestrials . . . and that is as far as you'll have got in the magazine version of this story. The rest of the book builds up to even greater heights. I'll not disclose the plot, but just say that looking back on the Pacific war, the title is most appropriate.

ASSIGNMENT IN ETERNITY by Robert Heinlein

(Museum, 9/6) containing four stories. **GULF**, a two-part serial from American "Astounding Science Fiction," a superb bit of Heinlein's technological development, filled with adventurous happenings; **ELSE WHEN**, a somewhat older story of alternate time-tracks; **LOST LEGACY**, in which surprising discoveries about parapsychology are made by Dr. Coburn and his associates, leading them into a vast and age-old plot for world domination; and finally a story which I think gives the most sympathetic treatment to the question of when and how do we recognise humanity in only quasi-human form? Jerry, in **JERRY WAS A MAN**, is an ape into whom intelligence has been artificially induced, and he is a "chattel," a non-human slave, who can be destroyed when no longer of service—or can he? The court scenes, by the by, are up to "Perry Mason" standard.

Among the anthologies currently available is **CATEGORY PHOENIX** (Bodley Head, 9/6, 191 pp.) containing three long "novels." The title story is by Boyd Ellanby, and deals with a totalitarian state of the future, in which the discovery of eternal life is made. Complicated plotting, exceedingly well written, and suspenseful. **FIREWATER**, by William Tenn, tells of the aliens, "fearfully intelligent dots in multi-coloured bottles" who just watch mankind. Attempts to contact them lead to the destruction of the moral fibre of humans, at the same time conveying to these people a kind of "idiot genius." Yet there was one type of man—and one type of alien—who could make contact without harm! Finally, James Blish with **SURFACE TENSION**.

SCIENTI PREVIEWS

News and advance Film Reviews Direct from Hollywood's

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

"He *tampered* in God's domain."

No, I have not turned back the clock a quarter of a century to review a revival from the Frankenstein-fraught era of the horror-film thirties; this classic cliché is the banal bromide voiced at the conclusion of *BRIDE OF THE ATOM*, vintage (believe it or not) 1955!

Twenty-five years ago, bad if not mad scientists were wont, according to those antiscientific asses who passed moral judgment on them, to "meddle with things man should leave alone"—aye, there was the rub! and the reason the evil experimenters and their blasphemous works were inevitably rubbed out in the 7th or 8th reel. But today all that has changed: there may be as many as *eleven* reels, and sometimes in wide-screen technicolor too. As we now know to our sorrow, the Marship *Geopal* (*CONQUEST OF SPACE*) was commanded by a religious fanatic who went loco in his attic at the enormity of invading "God's domain." Parenthetically. I wonder if Lapoeg—that's Geo Pal's opposite number on Mars—has recently released a picture called "The Conquest of Earth," in which a Martian pilot goes off his rocket midway to the Green Planet at the sacriligious audacity of mere mortal Martians daring to cross almighty space

and investigate that verboten part of S'dog niamod—translation: God's domain—which is the planet lying third farthest from the sun. Then my opposite number on the Red Planet must even now be beating his mighty barrel chest and pulling out his tendrils by the roots at what a yekrut—that's turkey spelled Marsward the picture is.

Pardon me if my sermon's showing, but I spent five times the price of this issue of *NEBULA* (*ten*, considering my wife was with me) to see a pre-showing of *BRIDE OF THE ATOM* that didn't *start* until seventeen minutes past ten at night, and that was *all* we saw for three dollars; and when I heard those immortal lines "He tampered in God's domain" for the *n*th time, I guess I just lost my temper!

I felt like I was caught in a time trap . . .

Lost in a serial universe . . .

Imprisoned in a moebius movie from which there was No Escape . . . no escape . . . (echo) no escape . . .

Every mundane movie must inevitably end with The End; this is reasonable, and I am reconciled to it. But I hope before *Finis* is written to the *Forry Story*, I live long enough to see that hoary chestnut quoted at the beginning of this column roasted

for all. There used to be some filmic and considerable fictional concern about artificial resurrection, and wasn't it a crime against nature to attempt to bring the dead back to life, and in any event wouldn't such a latterday, medical Lazarus be an empty shell, a soulless automaton whose spirit had passed on to Heaven or Hell or another plane of existence, leaving but pseudo-sentient clay, an evil zombie??? Yet commonly we read today in our newspapers and news-magazines of the drowned, the asphyxiated, the heart-attacked, the shocked who have been officially dead but who by heart massage, oxygenator and other medical resources have been restored to life, soul and all, without any antibiblical after-effects.

But I beg your pardon: you came to read a film review, and I have instead been lecturing you—or The Powers That Be.

BRIDE OF THE ATOM stars aged, ill, emaciated Hungarian horror actor Bela Lugosi. I know Lugosi personally—he has been a guest in our home. He has made a living from dying, and scaring others to death, but today, at 71, in real life, he is just a kindly, weary old man who has to go on working to keep body and soul together. A medical — repeat: *medical*—addict to drugs for years, he has recently been the subject of much newspaper and television sensationalism because he voluntarily had himself committed in order to try to be cured and regain his broken health. Quick to capitalize on the publicity surrounding Lugosi's misfortune, the producers are rushing BRIDE OF THE ATOM into distribution.

The plot of BRIDE is undoubtedly old wig to anyone who ever read a comic book, and even

I, if I am to believe by birth certificate, was a youngster once. Mad scientist Lugosi, mainly angry at his Iron Curtain countrymen for expatriating him, continues his experiments in Swampland, U.S.A. What he's aiming at accomplishing is a super race, superior in both physical strength and mental ability. His brilliant assistant is a mute moron, built like a bull, that he picked up somewhere at an auction in the wilds of Mongolia, making him a true Mongolian idiot. Man Mountain's main function is in assisting unwilling victims to the operating table, where they get an atomic jolt that's supposed to multiply both their I.Q. and muscles, but inevitably makes them candidates for the coroner instead. Since Lugosi can't afford a coroner, he gets rid of the bodies by feeding them to a crazy mixed-up squid who's so big he thinks he should have billing in Disney's 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA instead. In the end, the robotic assistant, his hirsute heart melted by a newspaper reporter type maiden in distress, revolts, turning on his master and pinning him to the table in place of his intended subject. Then, dramatically demonstrating who was the idiot around the lab, the Big Boy pulls the right combination of switches that Lugosi has failed to in two decades of trying, and the bolt that Bela gets turns him into one of his long sought supermen! Thereafter Lugosi absorbs enough powder-propelled lead to turn him into a metal man, but it takes a boulder as big as an elephant to fell him, whereafter his voracious squid has jello-à-la-Béla for dessert.

Good nite, kiddies, and pleasant dreams.

THE CYTRICON

A Short Report by Peter Hamilton

The First Kettering Science-Fiction Convention really began about three o'clock on Saturday, 9th April, when that five-star fan club from Liverpool presented a very amusing "radio programme," by way of tape recorder, craftily depicting a 'big-scale' science-fiction convention of the future. This included a number of hilarious impressions of well-known fans (including one of myself) and was "sponsored" by the makers of "Blog," the wonder multi-purpose beverage, and was produced in the best commercial radio style. "Blog" was actually put into production later the same evening, by someone who shall remain anonymous, but although it contained many choice ingredients, including baking soda, Scotch whiskey, blackcurrant juice and aspirin and was actually given away free at a riotous party which followed, there was not exactly a *demand* for it. But that is another story . . .

Other items on the programme included talks by John Carnell and H. J. Campbell, an enjoyable film show which included "The War of the Worlds," and an auction conducted by Ted Tubb.

During the rest of the time I met and enjoyed conversing with authors Ted Tubb, Sydney Bounds and Ken and Pam Bulmer; editors John Carnell and H. J. Campbell; artists Ken McIntyre, James Rattigan, Jack Wilson and Arthur Thomson; and many others including Nic Oosterbaan who travelled all the way from Holland to attend the convention, Ken Slater, Walt Willis, Terry Jeeves, Joy Goodwin, etc., etc.

On the Monday morning things began to break up and the George Hotel took on a very deserted look. It had been a most enjoyable convention and all thanks is due to Denny Cowen and his team for its organisation.

I'm booking in early for next time. Are you?



1. Joy K. Goodwin
2. Chuck Harris
3. Ron Bennett
4. Kenneth F. Slater
5. E. J. Carnell
6. H. J. Campbell
7. Walter A. Willis
8. Shirley Marriot
9. E. C. Tubb
10. Ken McIntyre
11. Sydney J. Bounds
12. Peter Hamilton
13. Kenneth Bulmer
14. John Brunner



The Convention as seen by Arthur Thomson—see page 108.



GUIDED MISSIVES



Letters to the Editor

Dear Ed.: Report on Adam opened well, and the various methods of penance offered the murderer were fairly well done, if a trifle lacking in imagination. The yarn really went on the rocks when the hero (still a murderer) made such staggering progress on his planet. As for educating a 17-year-old woman, AND rearing a family, AND enlarging his holdings, all within three years. Well, in the story it was too darned easy, and consequently my rating went right down with a bang, a 17-year-old may be sexually mature, and her muscles may be brought up to normal in a few months, but the brain, though more fully developed than in an infant, would not learn that much in three years. I've had enough trouble trying to teach normal (?) thirteen-year-olds that six nothings make nothing, so I know that teaching is not so easy as some Science Fiction writers would have us believe. Further to that, I had one girl of 12 in my class who does not yet know her TWO TIMES TABLE. What am I doing about it? Well, apart from handling the other 41, I have taught her the thing three times, only to have her forget it after each week-end. Educating a 17-year-old in three years, Hm.

TERRY JEEVES,
Sheffield.

* *Another interesting point, Terry. However, in fairness to the author of this story, I would like to point out that it does not*

say to what point the girl was educated, only that she bore a number of children to the hero during the course of the story.

Dear Ed.: "Operation Mars" was guilty of the one mistake that should never be made by a writer who worships at the shrine of the progress of science — namely, underestimating the power of the scientific mind. In my job I work with men who are nowhere near the level of the sort of men who would get into the first spaceships, they are merely competent engineers, but it is a pleasure to watch their minds in action. Trained, efficient, scrupulously careful and working to a system of procedure with built-in checks at every important point.

These men are a considerable step down from what space pioneers will be and, I can assure you, they would never forget about the difference in the lengths of Martian and Earth days. Surely that is a mistake on the same level as an editor casting off, I think it is called, a story and forgetting that one can print on both sides of the page.

This seems to be quite a common feature of stories by even our best authors — brilliant scientists overlooking a point that any school boy or science-fiction writer could pull them up on. Who that has read Wilson Tucker's marvellously written and conceived *The Time Masters* was not surprised and annoyed by the

ending? A superwoman, an intellectual giantess who feeds her husband, who is a mere genius, all the dope on how he is to build a spaceship. As well as this she wangles her way into the select few who are in charge of the whole project so that when the ship is complete she can steal it. Finally she steals it and blasts off to return to her own supercivilization. When she is safely into space it runs out that she, who had designed the ship and worked on the organization of the whole project hadn't known it was only an orbital rocket, and she was trapped for ever, doomed to circle the earth for eternity, imprisoned on a Man-made moon, etc., etc.

BOB SHAW,
Belfast.

* *Thank you for your view on what seems to be developing into an interesting talking point, Bob.*

*What do other readers think?
Is the highly trained scientific mind immune to forgetfulness in times of stress?*

Dear Ed.: I would like you to know how much I appreciate your editorial policy. It seems to me that too many of our folk are content to sit back and say that America has always produced the best Science Fiction, and let it rest at that. They seem to forget that Great Britain has contributed a major portion of the world's finest literature. Why shouldn't we eventually take the lead in this particular field too?

We like to hope that some day your efforts will be rewarded by the discovery of a truly great writer, one who will help to lift Science Fiction into the sphere of good literature, and thus erase the

ONE GUINEA PRIZE

To the reader whose Ballot Form (below) is first opened at the NEBULA publishing office.

All you have to do, both to win this attractive prize and to help your favourite author win the 1955 Author's Award, is to number the stories in this issue in the order of your preference on the Ballot Form below and post it to "Nebula," 159, Crownpoint Road, Glasgow, S.E., immediately.

Planetbound	
Mansion of a Love	
Counterpoint	
This Night No More	

Name and Address

Mr. E. J. Croft of Birmingham wins the prize offered in NEBULA No. 11. The final result of the Poll on the stories in that issue was:—

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. OPERATION MARS | |
| By E. C. Tubb | 34.8% |
| 2. THE YUPE | |
| By Charles Eric Malne | 15.1% |
| 3. A WORLD IN EXILE | |
| By Cyril Myrescough | 12.4% |
| 3. BOOMERANG | |
| By Eric Frank Russell | 12.4% |
| 5. UJUTJO | |
| By Harry Warner, Jr. | 10.2% |
| 6. TALENT | |
| By John Christopher | 8.6% |
| 7. THE TRESPASSERS | |
| By Bob Shaw | 6.5% |

The result of the Poll on the stories in this issue will appear in NEBULA No. 15.

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MISCELLANEOUS

SCIENCE-FICTION pocket books and magazines for exchange. Write for list.—A. Clark, Theddlethorpe, Mablethorpe.

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WHY not brighten up your party by having a film show in your own home? Moderate prices; all kinds of films. Glasgow and district only.—Nebula, Box A.

inferiority complex a lot of British Fans seem to suffer from in regard to America.

In the meantime may the sales of NEBULA multiply, and best wishes for your personal success.

FRANCES EVANS,
Manchester.

** I was very pleased to read your comments on this very important subject, Frances, and can assure you that NEBULA will remain "British First"—and proud of it!*

I believe that the vast majority of science-fiction readers in this country prefer literature written without the political taboos (and propaganda) imposed by a foreign government, and in British rather than American idiom and locale.

It would be a great pity if we had to rely entirely upon material written by and for people quite indifferent to British taste and outlook, without being able to exert the influence which we undoubtedly can on the British article.

American science-fiction is fine for a change — and for Americans.

LOOK HERE—from page 2

Of course, they speak for themselves, not for Nebula, a fact which has again been proved by the recent acceptance of stories by two of the new authors who I am proud to say I discovered, the same stories which first appeared in Nebula, for foreign publication. One for an American magazine with a circulation of over a million copies, the other for a popular Swedish Monthly. This proves that Nebula's reputation is second to none throughout the world and with the new regular appearance and consequent improvement in contents, it will soon be the most sought-after magazine of its kind anywhere on earth.

Peter Hamilton

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to
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